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THE  
FREE CHURCH PULPIT;

CONSISTING OF

DISCOURSES BY THE MOST EMINENT DIVINES

OF THE

*Free Church of Scotland.*

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## E R R A T A .

### IN VOL. I.

Page 142, line 9, *for* conversion, *read* conversation.  
 ~ 531, line 9, *for* all, *all* the inhabitants, *read* all the inhabitants.

### IN VOL. II.

Page 91, line 19, *for* creak, *read* creature.  
 ~ 94, line 24, *for* mortifying, *read* mollifying.

### IN VOL. III.

Page 268, line 9, *for* honours, *read* honour.  
 ~ 269, line 16, *for* But, *read* But if.  
 ~ 272, line 18, *for* departure as that of one who had been the glory of the prophet, *read* departure of the prophet as that of one who had been the glory.

# FREE CHURCH PULPIT.

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## LECTURE I.

BY THE REV. ALEXANDER W. BROWN, OF FREE ST  
BERNARD'S, EDINBURGH.

LUKE vi, 12-19.

OUR Lord, during his brief stay on earth, was actively engaged in working the work of Him that sent him. He preached the Gospel of the kingdom—gave unquestionable proofs of his Divine power—corrected the erroneous ideas that prevailed regarding his person and the nature of that dispensation which he came to introduce—brought life and immortality to light—and, at length, by his death upon the cross, accomplished the redemption of his people. But, as he could not be bodily present in every place at the same time, as, especially, the day would come when he would be removed from the earth and ascend to the right hand of his Father in the heavens, provision must be made for continuing the ministry of the word—for proclaiming the Gospel to all nations, and for thus gathering into his church, from age to age, all those for whom he suffered and died. In order that this might be done, he selected twelve of those who had, for some time, been constant attendants upon his ministry—who had witnessed proofs of his divinity—and who were to behold his glory in his transfiguration and ascension, and ordained them to the apostolic office, that they might declare to others “that which they had heard, which they had seen with their eyes, which they had looked upon, and their hands had handled of the word of life.”

The ordination of these men was gone about in the most deliberate and solemn way. It was preceded by a season of secret prayer on the part of Christ, in reference, no doubt, to the very important appointment about to be made. As those whom he was now to invest with the sacred functions of the apostleship would be exposed to no ordinary

difficulties and trials, and would require no ordinary qualifications, it is likely that his prayer for them would be, that they might be furnished with gifts and graces suited to the nature of their work—that they might have wisdom to guide them and strength to support them in executing that work—that God might accompany their labours with his blessing, and make them the honoured and successful instruments of spreading abroad the knowledge of Divine truth—of turning sinners from darkness to light—and of building up saints in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation. In this, Christ has left us an example that we should follow in his steps—that we should not only “enter into our closet, and shut to the door, and pray to our Father which seeth in secret”—that we should not only be “instant in prayer—pray without ceasing,” and “in all things, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, make our requests known unto God,” but that we should, in our approaches to the throne of Divine grace, make the interests of Christ’s church, and the advancement of Christ’s cause, the subject of our prayers, beseeching God to countenance and bless the labours of those who occupy a place in his vineyard, and to raise up, qualify, and send forth others who may work successfully in his service.

In Mark’s account of this transaction, we read that Christ “called whom he would,” (Mark iii. 13.) He selected those who, he knew, would best accomplish the design which he had in view—men neither high in rank nor eminent for learning, just that it might be seen and acknowledged that the establishment and spread of the Gospel were owing not to human power and wisdom, but to the agency of God himself. It is not our intention to enter, at present, into a minute detail of the life and character of the individuals here mentioned. We may just state generally, that, with one exception, they were good and holy men—partakers of the grace of God—devoted to the service of Christ—zealous and persevering in their honourable but arduous work—and martyrs, it is believed, in the glorious cause to which they were called. We do not say that they were perfect men. They laboured long under misapprehensions in regard to the spiritual nature of Christ’s kingdom. They were of like passions with ourselves, betrayed infirmities of temper, and were sometimes even overtaken in sin. Look at Peter, whose zeal, on more than one occasion, degenerated into rashness and into a want of respectful submission to our Lord, and who, notwithstanding his expressed resolution to stand by him to the last and to share with him the worst, soon after denied with an oath that he belonged to his company or that he ever knew who he was. Look at James and John, proposing, under the impulse of vindictive feeling, to call down fire from heaven upon those who would not receive

and entertain Christ—and at Thomas, manifesting a sinful incredulity, and making the most unreasonable demands, before he would admit the reality of Christ's resurrection from the dead. In these and in similar instances, they are proposed as warnings to us, and teach these two important lessons—that we are to follow them only in so far as they followed Christ, and that “he that thinketh he standeth should take heed lest he fall.”

There is one of these twelve, however, whose character was of the most revolting description, presenting no one feature to command our respect or secure our love. He, too, was a follower of Christ—like his brethren, owned and professed him before the world—and, for some time, doubtless, was, as far as external appearance went, a consistent disciple. He was called to fill one of the highest offices in the church of Christ, and, in all likelihood, possessed the requisite qualifications in point of knowledge, authority, and miraculous gifts. And yet he was an unbeliever, a stranger to the grace of God; he was a hypocrite, a selfish, covetous, hollow-hearted character. All his godliness consisted in gain. He was full of lies and deceit. He was, moreover, a traitor. He did not desert Christ. He did not become his open and avowed enemy. He retained his office—he kept up his apparent friendship for his Master; and yet he basely covenanted for his life—he sold him for thirty pieces of silver. He reached this climax in his career of iniquity not by a sudden impulse—he made the bargain deliberately and coolly, and with the symbol of love and friendship perpetrated the awful deed. He terminated his course in the most appalling circumstances. He hanged himself, and went to his own place.

Now, the question may be asked, Why he was numbered among the Apostles?—why Christ, who knew what he really was, permitted him to take his place among them. Our Lord did nothing in vain, and we may rest assured that he had a wise design in view in allowing this abandoned man to be one of the few whom he chose to this high office. You will remember what Peter said in regard to him when his place was about to be filled up—“Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost, by the mouth of David, spake before concerning Judas, who was guide to them that took Jesus; for it is written in the book of Psalms, ‘Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein, and his bishopric let another take.’” You will remember also what is said in the book of Zechariah—“And I said unto them, If ye think it good, give me my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver; and the Lord said unto me, Cast it into the potter, a goodly price that I was prized at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter,

in the house of the Lord." In the history of Judas we have a fulfilment of these predictions, and a strong proof, therefore, of the truth of Christianity. We have, in its support, the testimony, not of a friend, but of an enemy. If Christ had been palming an imposture upon the world, here was a man who could have easily exposed the whole. He was on terms of the most intimate familiarity with Christ and with his brethren in office—he was present at their private deliberations; and yet what do we find?—not a single insinuation tending to bring their character into suspicion—not a single charge of insincerity or artifice preferred against them. On the contrary, after perpetrating his deed of treachery, he bore open testimony to Christ's innocence; and, stung by the agonies of remorse, laid violent hands on himself.

Nothing is more common than for men to be prejudiced against Christianity, when they see those who make a profession of it fall into grievous sin. The history of Judas should teach us a different lesson—not to be greatly surprised, namely, if there should be occasionally, in the present enlarged condition of the Church, instances of defection resembling that which took place when it was yet only in its infancy. To all the people of God, these will be matter of sadness and of sorrow. They will grieve when they see the Redeemer wounded in the house of his friends; but knowing, as they do, the deceitfulness of their own hearts, and their own tendency to go astray and to fall, they will, instead of being discouraged in their course, only exercise all the greater watchfulness over themselves, and all the more implicit dependence upon the grace of Him who alone can enable them to stand fast in the faith.

All the members of the visible Church should take warning from the case of Judas. Here was an individual, one of twelve—a companion, a disciple, and an apostle of Christ—and yet an unbeliever—a traitor. Are there no such individuals in the Church now—persons numbering themselves among his friends, observing his ordinances, and yet belying their profession, despising his authority, and thus, to all intents and purposes, acting the part of Judas—betraying Christ? Let every one put the question to his own heart, as the Apostles did, "Lord, is it I?" Let this be done, especially, in the prospect of again sitting down at the Lord's table. It was at that very table, we believe, that Judas meditated his wicked deed; it was after rising from that table that he proceeded to put it in execution. We may shudder at his conduct—we may reprobate it. But let us look to ourselves. Have none of us once and again observed that holy ordinance, and by so doing avowed ourselves to be his disciples and friends, who yet have gone forth to the world, and, by our conduct there, have crucified him afresh, and put him to an open shame? Have we never, by our inconsistent walk, caused the way of truth to be evil spoken



against—thrown a stumbling-block before those who were anxious to find a pretext for their indifference and irreligion, and weakened the hands and grieved the hearts of the people of God? Let us examine ourselves, brethren, in this matter; and, if our hearts condemn us, let us repair anew to Him whom we have thus dishonoured, humble ourselves before him, and implore his pardoning mercy, and his grace to preserve us henceforward in a course of holy obedience and of growing conformity to his image.

The remaining verses present a very impressive scene. After a night of watching and prayer, our blessed Redeemer enters upon a day of labour. He comes down from the mountain to the plain. There were congregated vast multitudes from places near and remote, anxious to listen to his preaching, and to receive instruction in the way of life—many of them to be healed of the diseases with which they were afflicted; and he healed them all. Every form of distress yielded to that virtue which went out of him. The weak and wasted frame was endued with strength—the sightless eyeball opened to the light of heaven—the closed ear was unstopped—the demoniac was composed and restored to his right mind. Many a grateful heart, many a joyful lip, was there that day in the assembled throng. And have we not here, brethren, a strikingly emblematic representation of the spiritual condition of man, and of the fitness of the gospel to meet all the necessities of that condition? The maladies which sin has brought upon the soul are of various kinds. It has caused blindness; for “the natural man discerneth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned.” It has caused deafness; for though he has ears to hear, he will not “listen to the voice of the charmer, charm he ever so wisely.” It has weakened and prostrated the whole man; for he is without strength to do anything that is good. It has rivetted upon him bonds from which he cannot, by his own efforts, set himself free; for he is led captive by the devil at his will—the world exercises dominion over him—he is the servant, the slave, of his own imperious lusts. It has spread defilement over all the members of his body, all the powers of his mind, and all the affections of his heart, and rendered him altogether “as an unclean thing.” The gospel of Christ is wonderfully adapted to all these exigencies. It is a universal remedy,—that is to say, there is not a form of evil for which those who are labouring under it will not, on receiving and submitting to its gracious message, find an effectual cure. It reveals even to the chief of sinners a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, and promises unspeakable blessedness to all who repair to its cleansing waters. It offers light to those who are in darkness, and strength to those who are weak. It proclaims liberty to the captive, and the open-

ing of the prison to them that are bound. And, although it does not hold out the promise of the miraculous removal of temporal distress, its provisions extend, in a certain sense, even to that. All who are oppressed in this way will find, on coming to Christ, that virtue goes out of him. The believer who is in poverty may not have his burden removed or even lessened; but then he has grace given him to enable him to sustain it; and, in the possession and enjoyment of a better substance, even the unsearchable riches of Christ, he can say, "I have all, and abound." He may be called to mourn the loss of friends, and one stroke of bereavement may follow another till he is well nigh left alone; but, believing in Christ, he knows he has a brother born for adversity—one who, in all his afflictions, is himself afflicted, and who can heal his broken heart, and tenderly bind up his wounds. Such is the power of the gospel—such is the virtue that goes out of Christ.

But observe, my friends, that, just as the diseased multitudes were healed by touching him, there must be contact, if we may so speak, between him and the soul, before the soul can be saved—there must be union to him by faith. Noah was not safe from the waters of the deluge, until he entered the ark and until God shut him in. The manslayer was not safe from the avenger of blood, until he got within the gate of the city of refuge. And no sinner is delivered from condemnation until he be in Christ, the only refuge from the storm, the only covert from the tempest. It is not being within the reach of Christ's call merely—it is not seeing him through the medium of ordinances—it is not a temporary devotional frame of spirit—it is not a mingling with his people—it is not a zeal, however ardent, for the prosperity of his cause. These things of themselves will not do. They may all exist in the man who is yet out of Christ, who has not been brought into spiritual contact with him, and in regard to whom no virtue has gone out of Christ for his healing. We believe that many pass from the world, whose religion is without this one thing needful—who find, when they enter the next world, that the vital connexion between Christ and them has not been formed—that, while they were attentive in cultivating the outward marks of that connexion, they neglected the only thing that was worth the caring for, and that all their pains are unprofitable, that all their labour is lost. This certainly should serve to arouse one and all to reflection. There may be some present who have entered the sanctuary, labouring under the disease of sin, just as those who were gathered together in the plain before our Lord were afflicted with bodily distempers, and who are longing for deliverance just as that diseased multitude sought to touch Christ. Now, what have we to say to you but just this, that while you should labour to have right and

impressive views of your condition and danger, and of the suitableness and all-sufficiency of Christ, you should beware of stopping short and of resting satisfied with these. Any distance between you and Christ, however narrow and imperceptible, is ruinous, fatal. You must not only come near to him, you must touch him, for where there is no contact, there can be no forthgoing of virtue; where there is no faith, there can be no salvation. We say no faith, for this is the bond of union, this is the hand that touches Christ. And however feeble that faith may be, though it be but as a grain of mustard seed, though it reach only to the hem of his garment, virtue will be felt, the cure will be effected, sin will be forgiven, the heart will be changed.

And Christ is waiting to be gracious to you. Not one of those who now thronged around him was forbidden to touch him or rudely repulsed from his presence. He was there for the very purpose that all who needed him might come to him—he invited them to approach. However offensive, and defiling, and loathsome their diseases, they were all equally welcome; however inveterate their complaints, his touch removed them all. And, with regard to you, the case is precisely the same. The same free invitation is addressed to you—the same liberty of access is afforded to you—the same assurance of relief is held out to you. His language still is, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.” Come with your sins, and though they be numerous as the sands upon the sea-shore, though they be like scarlet and crimson, I will pardon them. Come with your polluted hearts, and, though they be dark and noisome as the grave, I will cleanse them. Come with your broken spirits, and, however deeply they be wounded, I will heal them. Come with your fears, and, however oppressive the burden, I will remove it. Come with your hopes, and, however faint and glimmering, I will make them strong and bright as the light of the sun. Come with your penitential tears, and, though they be like rivers of water, I will wipe them all away.

Suffer a word or two here in regard to the nature of that faith, without which no virtue can come out of Christ. In the 11th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, it is called “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,” that is, a cordial assent to the Divine testimony, an implicit reliance on the truth of all that God has stated in his word, and a persuasion that he will accomplish all the promises he has been pleased to make. It is conversant with objects which lie beyond the cognisance of the senses, and which are undiscoverable by the exercise of reason. These objects are exclusively matters of revelation; they make no impression upon the bodily organs; no process of argument can convince us of their existence—they are believed simply

because God has declared them. The representations of saving faith, however, given by the sacred writers, are uniformly connected with Christ. It embraces, indeed, all that God has revealed, and, in this sense, is common to us with all holy beings; but it regards especially Christ as Mediator, and, in this light, is peculiar to us as sinful beings, who, without this remedial arrangement, cannot be readmitted into the enjoyment of the divine favour. Throughout the New Testament, accordingly, we find that the confessions and descriptions of faith consist in this. Peter, in the name of his brethren, made such a confession in these memorable words, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." "Dost thou believe?" Christ asked the blind man whom he restored to sight—"dost thou believe on the Son of God?" "Lord," he replied, "I believe." "Believest thou this?" he asked Martha—the declaration, namely, which he had made regarding himself as "the resurrection and the life." "Yea, Lord," she answered, "I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God which should come into the world." When the Ethiopian eunuch was questioned by Philip regarding his faith, previously to his being baptized, he made this declaration, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." And when the Philippian jailor rushed with trembling anxiety into the presence of the Apostles, and enquired what he should do to be saved, the Apostles answered, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." But believing in Christ is something more than the bare acknowledgment of the truth that he is the Son of God and the Saviour of the world. It is not only an act of the understanding, as some maintain—the simple assent of the mind to the gospel, on perceiving the evidence of its truth—but an act of the will also, an exercise of the heart, embracing the truth, because it is seen to be intimately connected with our own best interests, and trusting in the object revealed from a clear perception of the suitableness and perfect sufficiency of that object. Hence it is called a fleeing to Christ, a coming to him, a looking to him, a receiving him, eating his flesh and drinking his blood—expressions denoting not merely the knowledge of him as the divinely appointed propitiation for sin, but a personal application to him under a conviction of our unworthiness and guilt—a renunciation of all self-righteousness, and an exclusive dependence on his mediation and intercession, as the only way whereby we can be delivered from the wrath to come. To be sound in the faith, we must not only know that, through him and him alone, pardon and acceptance can flow to the guilty, for the devils believe this and tremble. To be sound in the faith, we must do something more than admit that Christ poured out his soul unto the death for sinners—we must do something more than indulge the hope that we shall, or the wish that we may, be saved by

him, for multitudes have thus assented and hoped and wished, who have gone into eternity with a lie in their right hand. We must feel that we stand in need of the salvation which he offers—we must be brought to perceive that he is a Saviour suited in all respects to our ruined circumstances, and that in him there is treasured up a fulness from which alone all our spiritual wants can be supplied. We must see that there is utter inefficacy in every other means for our deliverance; that, without the shedding of his blood, there can be no remission of sin; that, except in the infinitely meritorious sacrifice which he presented to his Father in the room of his people, there is no refuge from the storm, and no covert from the tempest of the divine wrath to which we are exposed. We must be divested of all trust in ourselves, and receive and rest upon his righteousness, as revealed in the Gospel, for the pardon of our sins and for the acceptance of our persons as righteous in the sight of God for salvation.

This faith is the gift of God. No man can come to Christ except the Father draw him. No man can call Christ Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. The arm of the Lord must be revealed before a sinner will believe his report or set his seal to the truth of the record which he has given of his Son. If the heart be opened to receive him, it is God who by his Spirit opens the heart—if the withered hand be stretched out to lay hold of him, it is divine strength that enables it to make the effort—if the eye perceive his excellence and glory, it is the light of heaven that has purged the spiritual vision. God, in the covenant entered into with Christ, promises that a seed shall be given to him. But how can he perform this promise unless he be Lord and master of the human will, and have power to turn it whithersoever he pleases. Those who say that man has power to believe in Christ when he will turn this covenant into mockery, and virtually say that the promise made by the Father is one which he has no power to fulfil. To say that, by this covenant, Christ was to lay down his life for sinners, and to give his life a ransom for many, and to leave all the success of his mighty undertaking dependant on the sinner's will—that he was to lay down the complete price for the redemption of the slaves of Satan and sin, and that yet the slaves were to be left to follow or abandon at pleasure their former master—what is this but to cast a sinful reflection on the wisdom and power of both parties in the covenant, and to invest feeble and sinful man with power to defeat the purposes of God.

Let those present, who have been made partakers of the gift of faith in Christ, who have by grace become the subjects of his healing power, seek, in the exercise of faith, to cleave closely to him. For remember, brethren, that without the distinct and vigorous acting of this holy principle,

you will find yourselves in a languid sickly condition. This is the power which sets and keeps in motion all the other graces of the Christian character. Just as the spring in a watch moves the wheels within and the hands on the dial-plate without—just as, if the spring be broken, there can be no motion at all, or, if it lose aught of its elasticity, the motion must be irregular and defective, so, when faith is strong, it will infuse vigour and earnestness into all we do; while, on the contrary, if it be weak, we will be dull and spiritless in the service of God. Man must act in religion either by faith or fancy. The strength of the latter may make some start toward heaven, and impart a kind of relish for its enjoyments, but nothing can enable them to hold on save this one thing—to believe. And the experience of all who have known anything of this new and living way of salvation goes to prove, that, according as their faith increased or diminished, there was a corresponding increase or diminution in their spiritual progress, comfort, and joy. There cannot but be, when our faith is weak, a perpetual languishing and sickness of soul. All our life is to be obtained from the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom it is treasured up as light in the sun or as water in the plenteous spring. But what avails such fulness in him, if we have not access to it; and there is no access without faith. It is faith alone which conveys all vital influences from him to us. If these, which faith alone can bring, come not down, we can no more grow and flourish than the choicest vine without the warmth of the sun or the gentle showers of the teeming cloud. It is the best friend of the saint in all his dark and dismal hours, assuring him of his way, restoring him when he turns aside, and, when ready to faint by the length of his journey or the roughness of the road, imparting strength to enable him to surmount all obstacles and to hold on his way rejoicing. It is singularly useful when afflictions abound—when our souls are overwhelmed and in perplexity—and when horrors encompass us on every side. When the tempest rages—when the ocean seems blended with the sky—and when every billow of our sea of troubles threatens to bury us in its bosom, faith is the star to guide us to the fair haven—to the port of peace. Just as the storm-tossed mariners, when a certain constellation gleams through the dark clouds, are encouraged to hope that the raging elements will soon subside into a calm, so does faith bear up our hearts when the waves of affliction roll over us, till we are brought to a safe retreat—till our feet be firmly planted on the Rock of Ages. It proves a shield for repelling the temptations by which we are assailed. It can quench the flames of nature's lust, and extinguish the poisoned darts of hell. The soul, under its influence, can rise above the world—pierce the vault of heaven—with mysterious search discover more surpassing glories beyond the starry sphere—drink of the pure

river of the water of life that issues from beneath the eternal throne, and join, in anticipation, in those deep songs of joy that make glad the Jerusalem above, the city of the great King.

And look to yourselves, ye who have been in Christ's presence, and have heard Christ's gracious voice; but who have not yet pressed forward to touch him, because you have been insensible to your disease, and have had no desire to be made whole. If you perish, it will be because you would not come to him that you might have life. And, in the day of final reckoning, there will be many that will rise up against you. The Jew may say, "I was burdened with a legal yoke, which neither I nor my fathers were able to bear." He may complain that, in the best of their sacrifices, the smoke filled their temple, provoking the worshippers to weep for a clearer manifestation. He may say, we could but grope after Christ, your eyes were dazzled with his unclouded brightness—we had but an old edition of the covenant of grace written in characters which we could with difficulty decipher; you had that covenant in its clearest form, and our rejection of it as a lesson to you to close with its gracious offers. Had one of your days of the Son of Man been granted to us, we would not have neglected so great salvation." "And I," the poor heathen may say, "I perish without hope of reconciliation, and have sinned only against the covenant of works. I never heard of a gospel covenant, nor of the way of life through Christ. Had I heard but once such tidings as those to which you have listened, had mercy been but once pressed upon my acceptance, I should not have been here. But, alas! I never had so much as one offer of grace." "Such has not been the case with us," you must reply. We were favoured with these privileges—we were faithfully warned of the danger of sin—our guilt was forced upon our consciences—the necessity of fleeing to Christ was urged upon us; but we wilfully persisted in sin—we resolved to have nothing to do with Christ. We could not endure to hear his gospel; and all the hell we had on earth was that we could not sin in peace." Satan himself may say, "it is true, that, ever since my fall, I have been rebelling with a high hand against God, and seeking to defeat his purposes of mercy, and to involve mankind in the same guilt and misery with myself. But, when he drove me from his glorious presence, he said there would be no salvation for me. I have lived during various dispensations of grace—I have seen sacrifices offered for sin—I have beheld Christ himself in the flesh—I have heard his gospel preached; but what effect could all this have, save to increase my malice and inflame my rage? I had no interest in his merciful arrangements—I heard him, as it were, saying to me, "Look here, accursed spirit! I have provided a remedy for sin, but not for your's—I will pity and save some of those whom you have sought to ruin, but on

you I will have no mercy, you are reserved in chains of darkness to the judgment of the great day." "Woe is us," you will reply. "We had a remnant of the covenant of works as well as the heathen—we had all the discoveries of God in the law which the Jews ever had—we were placed under a better dispensation than were accursed spirits before their fall. The gospel of the grace of God was presented to us and urged upon us; and, therefore, O poor Jew! whatever may be said against your breach of the covenant, a thousand-fold more may be said against ours. Whatever, O wretched pagan! may be said against your sins, much more against ours. Whatever, O hopeless outcasts from the divine mercy! whatever aggravations attend your apostacy, they are white as snow compared with those which characterize ours. We are the most infatuated rebels that ever waged war against the grace of God.'

"Turn ye, then, turn ye, for why will ye die?" God is love. He has no pleasure in your death. Christ is waiting to be gracious. He calls upon you to come to him. "The Spirit and the bride say come, and let him that heareth say come; and let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely.' And now, as "ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled unto God."





## LECTURE II.

THE EPISTLE OF CHRIST.

BY THE REV. JAMES C. BURNS, KIRKLISTON.

“Ye are our Epistle, written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the Epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not on tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.”—2 Cor. iii. 2-3.

(Preached after a Communion.)

“YE are the Epistle of Christ.” It is not said ye ought to be, or ye profess to be, but “ye *are*.” This is your name, your distinction, your privilege. If ye truly belong to Christ, if ye are *his*, ye are his “*epistle*.” Christ himself is “the Word,” who was “with God, and was God,” and is with God again; the Revealer of the Father, his image; and Christ’s people, now that he is absent, are his “*epistle*”—by whom “the Word” speaks, by whom, in his absence, he is represented; who form the medium of communication between him and the rest of mankind, “the world” that knows him not. The title thus conferred on them is very descriptive, full of truth and beauty, and, as illustrated in the passage we have read, may suggest some interesting views both of Christian privilege and practice.

An epistle or letter, when you receive or get a sight of one, instantly fixes your attention, and raises a variety of questions respecting it—such, *e. g.* as the following:—Who is the letter from? Who is the writer of it—the same hand or another? What is it written upon, and how? What does the letter say? To whom is it addressed? For whose use is it intended? Now, to each of these questions the Apostle here supplies an answer, in reference to “the Epistle of Christ.”

I. The *Authorship* of the Epistle, “Ye are the epistle of Christ.” Christ is the author of the epistle—it emanates from him—it is his production—it is *his*. “Ye are *our* epistle, forasmuch as ye are the epistle of Christ,” as if he had said, “any interest we may have in you—any relation in which we may stand toward you, arises out of, and is subordinate to, the interest ye have in the Lord Jesus, and the relation in which ye stand to him!”

Thus we are reminded how close and endearing that relationship is, which connects Christ and his people mutually together. Each of them is as nearly connected with him, as a letter is with the person whose letter it is—so nearly that you can scarcely imagine anything nearer—that you cannot even in idea separate between the one and the other! A man's letters are just himself—his missives—his representatives, by which, though absent, he is virtually present—by which, though distant, he is brought near—by which, “being dead, he yet speaketh!”—by which he may be present in many places at one and the same time, and by which his life may be prolonged for generations after he is gone! There are letters now extant in the world which have been circulating for nearly 2000 years—the letters of Pliny the younger—the “Epistles of Paul;” and by means of them their authors are living still. Pliny lives as a companion to the scholar, Paul as a companion to the saint; and with him survive his elder, nor less honoured brethren, Peter, James, and John, all of whom we know—with whom we are privileged, if we choose, to hold daily converse. So, in his believing people, as his “epistle,” Christ lives; though absent, distant, dead, he still speaks and acts, and hither and thither circulates himself, so to speak, through the world. “He asked life of the Father, and it was given him, even length of days for ever and ever!” “The King's life has been prolonged, and his years for many generations.” His people are himself, for he lives *in* them! He lived in those Corinthians who are here addressed, who, from being the slaves of sensuality and sin, the very “epistle” of the wicked one, became his humble, holy, happy disciples, for they were *washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus*, and by the Spirit of our God.” He lived, too, in those disciples of his at Damascus, for whose safety he interposed, when he said, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou *me*?”—He lived, nor only lived, but laboured, and suffered, and triumphed in that same Saul himself, “who also was called Paul,” for, says he, “To me to live is Christ,” *i. e.* “to *me* to live, is Christ *to live*”—“Christ liveth in me.” And in writing to the Colossians, the same apostle further affirms it to be experimentally the very sum of gospel truth, the grand comprehensive theme of the gospel ministry everywhere, that Christ lives, not only *for* his people, representing them, but *in* his people, they representing him—“the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, is now made manifest to his saints. To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is, *Christ in you.*” (Col. i. 26-27.)

Dear brethren, do ye understand this “mystery?” do ye know any thing by experience of this blessed *union*—this double union, you in Christ, Christ in you? “Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith,

prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ *is in you*, except ye be reprobates?"

It might here be noticed also, that the expression before us indicates not only the close relation between Christ and his people, but the close relation subsisting amongst them mutually towards one another; they are not the "*epistles* of Christ," as if many, but "*the epistle*," only one; "of him the whole family in heaven and earth is named!" And there is not only here the *unity* of the Church of Christ, its unity *in him*, but its *perpetuity* also, for the epistle of Christ is one which dates as far back as the beginning of the world's history, and shall never be sealed up till it close!

II. But who is the *writer* of this Epistle? Sometimes, you know, the writer of a letter is a different person from the author of it. Paul says, at the close of his Epistle to the Galatians, "Ye see how large a letter I have written *with mine own hand*,"—implying, that he had frequently employed a substitute—an amanuensis; but implying also, that the letter was equally his, whether it was in his hand-writing or not—that he was still the author of it. So, "the epistle," of which Christ is the author, is here said to be written with or by "the Spirit of the living God." He is the agent by whom the work is done—it being his peculiar function, in the economy of grace, to speak, to write, to act, under the guidance, at the dictation of another—"to proceed from the Father and the Son." This was what Jesus intimated to the disciples before he left them, when he said, referring to "the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost," (John xvi. 13), "He shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you." And their experience corresponded with this intimation. So long as Jesus was in the world, he might be said to write all his letters himself. "The Holy Ghost was not then given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified." The work of conversion, so far as it visibly proceeded under the Saviour's ministry, was his own immediate work. Every one of the disciples received his call from him. The "five hundred brethren," to whom he showed himself alive after his passion, were those to whom he had spiritually revealed himself before it; and "last of all," says Paul, "he was *seen* of me also, as of one born out of due time"—while the Author was present, his deputy was unseen.

But, when Jesus went away, the Comforter came, and ever since the work of enlightening and converting human souls has been peculiarly, pre-eminently his. "The epistle" is in his hand-writing—every line,

every letter of it is inscribed by him. It is a living epistle, and the life is breathed into it by him—for he is the “Spirit of the living God.” It is He who quickens the dead soul at first, and who preserves it alive afterwards. Its animation, its warmth, its growth, its energy, its usefulness are all derived from him. “He begins the good work, and he performs it, until the day of Jesus Christ.” All the real living religion that is now abroad in the world is the Holy Spirit’s work. Where he is present, in a church, among a people, in a soul, there is life. Where he is absent, though there may be every thing else that bears the semblance or the name of religion, there is only death.

To illustrate this truth, and show the preciousness of it, is the apostle’s design, in the remaining part of this chapter—to shew what a privilege it is for us that we have been placed under “the *ministration* of the Spirit.” The ministry of Moses was glorious—the ministry of Christ was more glorious; but the ministry of the Spirit is the most glorious of all. It is “the glory that excelleth.”

III. But *how* does the Spirit work? What materials—what implements does he use?

Every epistle implies the use of three things—paper, ink, and pen, and reference is here made to each.

1. “Ye are the epistle of Christ, written not” on paper, nor “on tables of stone,” as the *epistle* of Moses was, the law, “the ministration of death,” but “in fleshy tables of the heart.” The religion of the New Testament is a *spiritual* religion. Its seat and its centre of influence is in the heart, deep among its warmest affections. It is there that its power is felt, and its pleasures are enjoyed; and it is because the inscription of its blessed truths is written there, that “the epistle of Christ” is at once so perfect and so durable. It is *perfect*, or rather only it is *complete*—complete at once—complete in every copy of it—complete in all its parts, though perfect in none—for it is “the whole man” that receives the Divine impress; and it is *durable*—durable as the *soul* itself—“the *tables* of the heart” are imperishable.

2. The *ink*. “Ye are written,” says the apostle, “not with ink” as other epistles are—not with ink *merely*, for ink merely touches and traces the surface—“but with the Spirit of the living God.” It is the truth of the Gospel—the truth that relates to Christ, by which sinners are converted and saints edified—by which the work of inscription is done. But that truth of itself is powerless to reach farther than the understanding or the conscience of those to whom it is addressed. It has no power to reach below the surface—to touch “the fleshy tables of the heart.” It not only does not itself convey life; its tendency rather is to con-

firm and deepen the slumber of spiritual death — “ the letter *kill*eth ; but the Spirit giveth life,” (v. 6) : when he takes the Word and applies it, he makes it “ quick,” that is, *living* ; and so it becomes “ powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” The truth of the Gospel, then, having become a living truth, and the tables of the heart prepared for it being “ fleshy,” warm, susceptible, living too, the inscription of the one upon the other becomes an easy thing, and, once written, as with ink of the Spirit’s own manufacture, the writing remains, distinct, all-pervading, indelible.

3. The *pen*. To this the apostle alludes, when he says, “ Ye are the epistle of Christ *ministered by us*,” by us who have *preached* the gospel to you, whom “ God hath made able ministers of the New Testament, not of the letter, but of the Spirit, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life,” (v. 6). It was to the ordinance of a gospel ministry that the Corinthians *instrumentally* owed their conversion ; and thus we are reminded how precious an ordinance that is, and how much we ought to prize it ! “ The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation.” “ It pleases God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.”

Yet how valueless and fruitless a thing is it, when unaccompanied by his blessing ! How entirely dependent the ablest minister of Christ is ! Paul here alludes to his own labours, and his own success ; yet though he could speak with such confidence of the souls that he had won—of the “ living epistles that had been ministered by him”—mark at the same time his deep *humility*. He reminds his believing brethren, that though he had been employed in the work of inscribing those epistles, oftener employed and more honoured than any other man before or since, it was not as the author of one of them, nor yet as the amanuensis, but simply as the instrument—the pen ! “ Not that we are sufficient of ourselves, to *think* any thing as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God,” (verse 5.)

IV. Having thus traced the process by which “ the epistle of Christ” is produced—the process of its composition—the question next arises, What is the *subject matter* of the epistle ? What does the letter say ? That which you *expect* to find in a letter, is the *mind* of its author—what he thinks, how he feels ; not his mind only, but his *heart*. It is as a substitute for congenial personal converse that you value it ; if it wants

the ease and affability of such converse, it is of little value—if it wants the truthfulness and sincerity, it is of no value at all.

Now, Christ's people may be called his "*epistle*" for both these reasons. They represent to their fellow-men both the mind and the heart of Christ—both what he thinks, and how he feels. He thinks and feels *through* them.

1. Says the Apostle, "we have the *mind* of Christ"—we know it, he has revealed it to us. It is our mind because it is his! Nor was this privilege peculiar to him and his inspired fellow-apostles. It is the common privilege of all "who believe on Jesus through their Word." "Henceforth, I call you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth"—he is not accustomed to be admitted to his Master's confidence—"but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard of my Father, I have made known unto you." "He that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit"—there is but one mind as it were between them. "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things."

Christ's *mind* is in his word—his whole mind, at least as much of it as he designs at present to make known. And Christ's word is the Christian's rule—his only rule,—“He cannot go beyond the Word of the Lord, to do less or more!” Christ's word is the law of his household, to which all its members, from the youngest to the oldest, have been taught to submit—which all, likewise, in its substance at least, have been taught to understand. And so it comes to pass, there is but one mind pervading the entire body, “one Lord,” and, therefore, “one faith”—and because one faith, therefore “one baptism!” Christ lives in his people, when “his *words* abide in them.”

Does he then, dear brethren, live in you? Do his words abide in you? Do ye think like him? Ye do, if ye are “his epistle.” Ye think as he did, for example, about sin—ye think as he did, also, about salvation—ye think as he did about the world, for ye know what the world thinks of him—ye think as he did about time—ye think as he did about eternity! Do ye indeed, yea or nay? But,

2. Christ's people *feel* as he does. They are of one heart with him; and in as far as they are so, they are of one heart with one another. His heart has been in some measure transfused into them, so that what he loves, they love—what he hates, they hate—what honours him, they rejoice in. There is a mutual sympathy between him and them—between them and him. “He is *formed* in them,” and “he dwells in their hearts by faith.”

This is a trying test of our Christianity, but it is a true one; for being written on “the fleshy tables” as we have seen, Christianity is *essentially* a thing of the affections. Its light is warm as well as clear—it

pervades the head and the heart together. And its *heat* as well as its light comes from Jesus by reflection, by emanation from "the sun." True, indeed, in respect of degree—of intensity—the distance between Christ and his people—between *the feeling* of his heart and theirs—is immense is immeasurable. But still, so far as they do feel, their affections flow in the same channel—the same heart throbs within them; and however faint or indiscernable at times its pulsations, that heart always beats *true*.

Is it so, brethren, with you? It was *love* which filled the heart of Jesus—love to God and love to men—love to his Father—and love to those "whom he was not ashamed to call his brethren"—love to saints—love to sinners—love especially, and tenderness, gentleness, graciousness, to convinced sinners, the bruised, the broken-hearted, the heavy laden, the weary! "Love is the fulfilling of the law." Thus he fulfilled it—"it was *written* within *his* heart." Has it been written in *yours*? "Every one that loveth is born of God." Every one loveth that is born of God. Love is "the perfect bond" that assimilates and unites the whole family of God. The sentiment, the very soul of the living epistle of Christ, is love."

V. The *destination* of this Epistle. To whom is it addressed? For whose use is it specially intended?

Every letter is addressed to some one by the sender of it—it is designed to convey the sentiments of the one mind into the other—it is a *communication*, and sometimes the communication is of such a nature that, besides its original and private purpose, it is meant for the public eye—for wide and general perusal. Such is the double address or destination of the epistle spoken of here. It is intended, first, for the benefit of the Church, and next, for the instruction of the world.

1. "Ye are our Epistle written in our hearts." The Apostle speaks here in the name of his fellow-labourers as well as in his own, and what he says is, that they, the believing Corinthians, were to them, instead of all other credentials—instead of all other "letters of commendation" (verse 1), either to them or from them—they were living proofs of the efficacy of a preached gospel—living witnesses to "the excellency of that power which is of God," which conveys the gospel "treasure" into empty perishing souls, albeit the vessels, the instruments of its conveyance, are so unworthy and mean.

Thus we are reminded, that the strength, the glory, the beauty, of any Church of Christ, consists in the number of *living* members that stand on its roll of communion; and when a minister of Christ can reckon many of them, or any of them, as having been "ministered by him," they are the rich reward of his labour—they are his "glory and joy!" Thus

also we are reminded that the honour of Christ, and so the reputation of his Church, is entrusted to the keeping of each individual member of it. Each copy of the epistle is designed to represent the fair original, and it is just by the multiplication of such copies that the original becomes more widely known—that the “sweet savour of his knowledge is made manifest in every place.” See that this consideration be ever present with you, “brethren, beloved in the Lord,” as characteristic of your Christian calling. “The edifying and the increase of the body depends on the effectual working in the measure of *every part*—it is fitly joined together, and *compacted* by that which *every joint* supplieth.” Each member is connected with every other, and all are mutually dependent. “Now, ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular!” But,

2. This “Epistle” is designed for other eyes than those of friends and brethren. “Ye are our epistle, known and read of all men, forasmuch as *ye are manifestly declared* to be the epistle of Christ;” intimating that the people of Christ have a special mission, not only in relation to the Church, but also in relation to the world. The epistle is meant for universal perusal—to be looked at, to be studied, to be scrutinized, to be copied, to be written over again! Ye are “*in the midst* of a crooked and perverse nation;” they are, so to speak, your next door neighbours, and among them ye are to “shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life.” Those who know Christ are to make him known. “Let him who heareth say, Come!”

Now, a letter which is to be generally read must be both legible and intelligible—the hand-writing must be distinct, and the language must be explicit, requiring neither translation nor commentary—level to the capacity of all. Just such ought to be the Christianity of the people of Christ; not only a secret, but a visible thing; “the *writing* in the heart” having its index and its exhibition in the history. Your life must be like Christ’s outwardly, as well as your sentiments and feelings inwardly, if ye would be “*manifestly declared*” to be the epistle of Christ, and for this obvious reason, that there is nothing else which men see—there is nothing else which “the world knoweth;” or, whatever else they see, they invariably judge of and estimate everything else by *that*. Our Christianity will be accounted of, whether we will or no, not by what we think or say, but by what we do—not from what we seem in the sanctuary, or on the Sabbath, or at the sacrament, but from what we are in the transaction of our worldly business, in the every-day intercourse of life. It is not the *scal* upon the letter that men judge by, nor yet by the *sentiment* or the *style* of it, but by its *substance*—by its real, practical utility. And they are right in so judging. “By their fruits,” said Jesus himself, “ye shall know them.” “Herein is my Fa-



ther glorified that ye bear much fruit, so shall ye be," so shall ye be proved, "manifestly declared to be my disciples," "known and read of all men," as such. This is a language which needs no translation, no interpretation; men of every tongue can understand it—it is the only true universal language. The epistle of Jesus Christ is just Christianity *adapted*, made plain to the intelligence of the world.

Dear brethren, what say ye now to this delineation of what "*ye are*."

1. Does it stagger some of you, and stir within you the uncomfortable doubt, whether, if this be true, ye may not have been hitherto mistaken altogether in supposing that you are Christians? It were well if it did, for unquestionably there are many who labour under such a delusion, in respect to whom there can be no doubt at all; and it is very possible that case may be yours. You cannot make the discovery too soon—you cannot cherish the doubt too anxiously. A man can never suffer in the end from being undeceived; however painful the process in the meantime; truth is always safe, however grievous. The *safety* of a sinner may he said to turn on his being really convinced that he is in danger—on the discovery of his being lost. But this text, while it is fitted to help to that discovery, may help also to another, viz., to the discovery of the way by which your mistake may be rectified, by which ye may *become* what hitherto ye have only seemed! for it tells you of "the Spirit of the living God," who quickeneth the dead, and maketh those things that be not as though they were—who abideth in the Church for ever; it tells you that this Spirit is in the gift, at the disposal of the Lord Jesus, who is the *friend of sinners*—it tells you that it is "through the word which by the gospel is preached unto you" that the Spirit works—that Christ *draws* sinners to himself—and so it tells you, that you have but to receive the word, as did the Corinthians, into your heart—you have but to *submit* yourselves, as they did, to its moulding and transforming influence; you have but to *close* with Christ, from whom the Spirit comes, as he offers himself to you in the gospel, in order to pass through their experience, and to attain their distinction, to be "*washed*, and so justified,"—and if justified, then also "*sanctified*," conformed to the image of God's dear Son! "*the genuine epistle of Christ!*"

2. Or, perhaps, there are some of you, who, though not so much alarmed, yet cannot but feel *ashamed and humbled* in listening to such a representation—ashamed and humbled in the thought, that at the very best it is so partially true, that though you do desire to be like Christ, you are yet so very, very far from having reached that attainment, your progress is so very slow. It may be, that besides, you have to lament

manifold blots and blemishes, as having disfigured you in times past, making the copy so unfaithful to the original, that the resemblance has often been indiscernible—that the more you become acquainted with the original, you seem the farther away from it, and assimilation to it becomes the more hopeless,—that however beautiful in theory the representation of the text may be, you cannot help feeling, as often as you look into that dark, foul heart of yours, which Satan is so busy in seeking to inscribe with the features of his own dark and hateful image, the actual realization of it is a thing well-nigh impossible.

It is well, again, if such be the effect of it. You cannot be too deeply humbled—too thoroughly self-emptied and abased. Doubtless, those very Corinthians, who were commended by the Apostle, who held so high a place in his esteem, held quite as low a place in their own, their humility being in very proportion to their advancement in the knowledge and imitation of Jesus Christ. It is always so, and it may be so, peradventure, in regard to some of you; but at all events this text again supplies matter of encouragement, no less than of humiliation. If it shews you how far you still are from resemblance to Christ, it shews you also how that distance may be lessened—how you may most surely advance. If there is really union between Christ and you, let there be communion also—let there be much—let there be more of it: and if there be communion, there will be resemblance—the resemblance will grow and brighten by every new act of contemplation—by every new act of comparison between the copy and the original—between “the living epistle,” and the living “Word.” And the blessed process once begun will never be suspended, at least it will never be stopped; it will advance and grow, till, in the presence of the living Word himself, and “seeing Him as He is,” ye are made to reflect the very image of his excellency, and “are satisfied with his likeness.” “We all, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” (v. 18).



## SERMON CVIII.

A WITNESSING CHURCH—A CHURCH BAPTIZED WITH THE HOLY GHOST.

BY THE REV. GEORGE SMEATON, AUCHTERARDER.

"For John truly baptised with water; but ye shall be baptizd with the Holy Ghost, not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him saying, Lord wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel; and he said unto them, it is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."—Acts i. 5-8.

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THE last interview with a dear friend, and his last words, are wont to be embalmed in fragrant remembrance; and when Jesus, about to enter on his glory, stands before our eye, promising the Spirit, with his last recorded words, should not his holy image be indelibly portrayed on our hearts, and ever recur, in the multitude of our thoughts within us, to delight our souls? The baptism of the Spirit was not alone for early times, nor confined to miraculous gifts, but is as lasting and extends as widely as the duty of bearing witness unto Christ.

Omitting the question raised by the disciples in the 6th verse, a comparison is made between the baptism with the Holy Ghost, and John's baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Such as truly turned from sin to God, whose hearts were prepared as a dwelling for the Spirit, were, at a later day, baptized with the Holy Ghost as with fire. The first repentance from dead works went before—the new unction from above came after—and this is not to be explained away.

Notice also the time—not many days hence. God is sovereign in fixing a fulness of time, and we may not ask why that time was appointed to reveal his arm. But on our part, also, it is necessary to know our want of the Spirit, and to feel it, that we may welcome him with the more delight to testify of Jesus. Had the disciples not continued with one accord in prayer and supplication till the Spirit came—or had they begun to testify of Jesus without child-like compliance with his word and will—this labour would have been in vain. And, in like manner nothing but bitter disappointment can await us, if we go forth to pro-

claim the tidings of great joy, not clothed with power from on High— with lips not touched with a live coal from the altar of our God. Often, alas ! have we returned with nothing but the toil for our pains, because we did not wait to pray down the Spirit. How often do we run in vain, and labour in vain, when we presume on a sufficient message, and a sufficient preparation to declare it, though not glowing with the love of Jesus, nor with the savour of the heavenly things we testify ?

The doctrine then we shall examine is, a church is only so far a witnessing church as it is baptized with the Holy Ghost. For while no fitness can be found in any instrument to procure the Spirit by intrinsic excellence, or to move the sovereign Lord to reveal his arm, neither does God pour out his Spirit to any large extent without fitting for the work the instruments whom it shall please him mainly to employ. In opening up the doctrine, consider—

I. The nature of this Baptism, its mark, and on what occasions it is conferred. That somewhat more is meant than renewing in the spirit of our minds, is plain from this, that the disciples were already found in Christ. The baptism of the Spirit is the great promise of New Testament times to all the Israel of God. Before Pentecost, God's children were not wholly exempt from the spirit of bondage, nor were the saints of old ; but in the days of the Apostles the saints in general seem to have enjoyed the promise of the Spirit through faith. The Holy Ghost is the first fruits of glory ; and the complete inheritance, when sin shall be found no more, is just a fulness of the spirit. Let us take whatever measure of the Spirit we enjoy below as but a foretaste of those joys, a spark of that glory, a part of that fulness of holiness, a drop of that ocean of bliss. To undervalue this baptism of the Spirit, is the beginning of all declension. Are we baptized with the Holy Ghost ?—then not only condemnation ceases in the conscience, but also the refreshing from the presence of the Lord, for which we longed, is in good part realized. Are we baptised with the Holy Ghost ?—then, forgiven much, we love much, and give ourselves to him who gave himself for us, heart for heart, surrender for surrender. Thus, being ravished with the excellency of our Lord, and with a high esteem for him, our heart is full of love, and our mouth of praise. It is the nature of fire to send forth light ; and when the Spirit comes to baptize us as with fire, truth is shed abroad upon our hearts as part of ourselves, and Christ is set before our eye in the bright image of his dying obedience and of his glorious reign. It is of the nature of fire to warm us ; and when the Spirit comes in this fiery baptism, he comes to kindle our cold souls into a flame of love to God and man. The approach of this genial spring to the barren winter

of our hearts, opens the blossoms of new life, of humility, and godliness. Not only does he confer the Divine seal of a peace that passeth understanding, but he leads us to yield ourselves for evermore to the Redeemer as his dear-bought property, and to walk with God. It might be thought that the heavenly joy of this baptism would make a man secure ; but, on the contrary, he now renounces all claim to himself. A believer, anew baptized by the Spirit, is like the springing fields glistening under the rains of heaven ; he revives as the corn, and grows as the vine ; and, feeling that he is not his own, he lives alone for his Redeemer. They who are content without this boon are just content without partaking of God's holiness. It is the nature of fire, moreover, to spread abroad. I am come, said Jesus, to send fire upon the earth, and what will I if it be already kindled ? And, when the Spirit comes in this fiery baptism, the words of Jesus spread like a conflagration from mouth to mouth. In the early days, when the Apostles were under this fresh baptism, and also in the days of the Reformers, the burning words spread from home to home, from land to land.

If we would know to what extent we share in this heavenly baptism, let us ask, how far does the unction of heavenly knowledge, the self-denied humility, the boldness, the decision of the first disciples, imbue our minds ? The comparison will furnish matter for deep humiliation.

I said the unction of heavenly knowledge, whereby we know all things—for no sooner did the Spirit come upon them, than they penetrated into the inmost nature of the revelation of God. They who a few days before scarcely understood the Saviour, whom he often reproved as slow of understanding, who had well-nigh forgotten what they learned for three years in his company, came, in the twinkling of an eye, to a clear, vivid understanding of the things of God. Every faint remembrance of the words of Jesus and of his office stood fresh before their eye, as if bathed in light, and they spoke with an authority no less overpowering than had been stamped on the burning words of prophets. Would we learn how far this baptism with fire is ours ? Let us ask, is the word as a fire shut up in our bones, opened up to us with living power, with spirit and life ? The Spirit, in his blessed errand, comes only in the word which he inspired at first. Is the truth, then, shed abroad with such brightness, with such an overpowering flood of light, that every promise is joyously sealed upon the soul, and the word is taken up into the heart as part of ourselves ? In so far only is this baptism ours.

I said their self-denied humility : for however envy and a proud thirst for honour held possession of their minds before, they now discover a single eye to the Redeemer's glory. They were only awed by what they saw of Christ's humility, in whose soul no self-seeking wish found place,

but now they no more seek the highest place. They no more betray a restless craving for sitting, one upon the right hand, and the other on the left. Nor do they make Christ a servant to their wish for pre-eminence; but they longed to decrease that Christ might increase. Inflamed by a different spirit, their previous desire to stand forth as the greatest was laid in the dust. Would we learn how far this spiritual baptism has been shed upon our Church, our ministers, our people? If filled with self-complacency, as if we stood in need of nothing—if we cannot bear to be wholly laid in the dust, we have not seen the Spirit, neither known him. No church in Christendom is more exposed than ours to self-complacency for its sacrifices, its devotedness, its self-denial—more liable to be elated with unexpected success—more prone to glory in its ministers, its means, its numbers, in its contributions, in its schemes, in its prominent position before the world's eye. Let us watch and pray against the snare, and learn to glory in the Lord. Are we still full of self-complacency—of the fond opinion that we possess peculiar claims on God for self-denial in his service? Do we squander time, talents, reading, speaking upon self, while Christ's honour is not habitually our highest aim—while our absorbing desire is to enjoy distinction above others? Do we betray our self-sufficiency by censorious judgments upon other saints instead of thinking others better than ourselves? Do we betray our pride by embittered feeling against such as thwart us, as neglect our own or our Church's fancied merits, not trembling like Paul, lest men should think of us above what they see us to be, or that they hear of us. The disciples would be great, and the Redeemer tells them, that they must be as humble as the little child he placed among them; and are we still as they before Pentecost? The Lord will not give his glory to another, and severely visited this sin upon a Nebuchadnezzar, a Herod, and even on his own beloved Moses; and are we still over-weening, self-seeking, proud? To that extent we have sinned away the Holy Ghost, and want this fiery baptism.

I said their boldness: for however timid before, the disciples no sooner receive the Spirit than they come forth like different men, to speak the word without fear. They who durst not speak a word for Christ, became of a sudden so undaunted, that they charged home their heinous sin upon the Jews; and he who, but a little while before, had trembled in the presence of a servant maid, could not but tell thousands to their face, that Jesus whom they crucified with wicked hands, is now Lord and Christ; and as far as we too are baptized with the Holy Ghost as with fire, we shall summon the world to submit to Christ as Lord of all. But do we sit side by side with the impenitent, and not quit ourselves as witnesses for God, as living epistles of Christ, as the salt of the earth? Are we a

comfort to the world by conforming to its ways? Are we the cause of evil to unconverted men by our worldly spirit, by our flattering words? Does the fear of man prevent us from openly walking in Christ and Christ in us, so that he may be set in us for the fall and rising again of many? So far as we sink into inaction, content to live in friendly neighbourhood to a world lying in the wicked one, content without further aggression, do we shew we want that fiery baptism that made the disciples feel they could not without blood-guiltiness let men alone. O, if we can sit as a church or as individuals, in easy fellowship with sinners, not seeking to save souls, not daring to encounter the adversary face to face, we shew that we are not baptized as with fire!

I said their decision: for however the disciples might be diverted from prayer and the work of Christ before, no sooner did the Spirit come upon them than they gave themselves wholly to these things. They who vacillated to and fro, who changed like the tide, had now one all-absorbing motive, and were borne along in the work of Christ, turning neither to the right or to the left; they continued daily with one accord in the temple. How can we then have received the heavenly baptism, if we are without the habit of religion, if our earnest efforts are but fitful, if we neglect present duty, and yet cherish the romantic hope of future service in a post which God has not required us to fill? If slothful in seeking God in prayer, in cultivating a holy relish for the things of God, if we never pray unless peculiarly helped, if we never put forth any activity in holiness unless God give victorious aid, can we have this fiery baptism? So intensely occupied in one pursuit were the Apostles, that public business was handed over to others, that they might give themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. If, as a church, or as individuals, we can afford time for work of a distracting nature, to lead us from prayer and from the word—if business of a public nature holds a loftier place in our esteem, so far we shew that we have not the disciples' baptism. I might mention other things in the disciples, as a willingness to suffer for the Lord, their cordial love, and unanimity; but

How shall we obtain this baptism, and on what occasions is it given? I do not say that a gracious God has bound himself by any promise to the impenitent in all the scriptures of heaven—that means employed by them has power with a sovereign God or prevails; but I do say, from the Word, that such as already enjoy the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, may obtain supplies of the Spirit a thousand-fold greater than any they have ever known.

Are we faithful in a little? God's rule is, To him that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundantly. Small at first were the faith, the hope, the love of the apostles; but yet a little while and the

spark became a flame—the mustard seed became a tree. We, too, may yet have small delight in holiness, in prayer, in the Word—we, too, may yet be of little faith, of wavering love, of flickering hope; but be faithful in a little, and a larger measure shall be given. The least breathing of the Spirit is worth a thousand worlds; and only as we are faithful in a little is this fiery baptism shed upon a church, a minister, a follower of Christ.

This heavenly unction is conferred when we keep the Lord's word, and shew a humble, penitent compliance with his will. Behold this in the hundred and twenty disciples who were enjoined by their Lord to tarry in Jerusalem till the Spirit came—who were neither to return home to Galilee, nor to distract their minds with worldly cares. They continued through those fifty days to wait as they were told. And if we would receive the Spirit's special presence to enlighten what is dark, to inflame what is cold, to strengthen what is weak and ready to perish, we must emerge from cold indifference to a simple compliance with the Lord's word and will. The world cannot receive him, cannot see him, neither know him. But, said the Saviour, If a man keep my words, we—that is, my Father and I, by the baptism of the Spirit—will come to him and make our abode with him. Repent, said Peter, again, to the awakened multitudes, and ye shall receive the Holy Ghost. And we, too, shall be filled with the Spirit, if we discover their godly sorrow and contrition—their penitent compliance with the will of Christ. Let him who was addicted to the lusts of the flesh—who could not receive the Spirit or become his temple—daily learn more and more to abandon all fellowship with darkness, and he shall receive the Holy Ghost. Let him who was addicted to the lust of the eye, daily learn farther to give up his worldliness, his covetousness, his unmerciful hard-heartedness to others, and he shall receive the Holy Ghost. Let him who was addicted to the pride of life, learn daily to think more meanly of himself, and to take the lowest place, and he shall receive the Holy Ghost.

Another occasion is, when some heavy trial, some arduous duty, is laid on us for the sake of Christ. Witness John in the spirit amid the wilds of Patmos, or Paul glowing with the love of Christ, and singing praises in the inner prison. A special presence of the Lord, a better and more ample unction from on high, awaits us as a gracious reward for every dutiful compliance with suffering for Jesus. For the honour of the Lord, it becomes us to bear in mind that, in the history of this Free Church we have felt, and our brethren in Switzerland seem to experience at this hour, that a fresh baptism of the Spirit follows every step of faithfulness to our Lord. This is a new gale to fill our sails, and sent by him who is not forgetful of our labour of love—to waft us



forward to fresh devotedness, spirituality, and success. Let us seek, then, new fields of self-denial; for we know that there is laid up for us on High the Spirit's rich communications—the full supplies of the gracious Saviour as a present reward. But, as a solemn warning to take heed lest we fall, how seldom, if ever, do we see a Church rising above its first tone—how common for all Churches to fall far below it?

Another occasion, and a rule with God in reference to this baptism, is our unceasing prayer of faith. Ten days had the disciples continued with one accord in prayer, when, of a sudden, the Spirit came to give spiritual eyes, and a joy which no man could take from them. But the prayer which brings down the Holy Ghost, is not that which ceases if not heard at once, or if the heart is out of tune—that is content to stop with praying out some little savour or enjoyment of God's presence. The prayer which prevails with him who gives the Holy Spirit to them that ask him, is that which will not let him go without a blessing. Might not every day be a Pentecost—might not we receive the Spirit daily—if, using what we have in all faithfulness, and pleading in faith for what we have not, we feared to grieve him by unholy passions, or by slighting his presence? Every day would be a Pentecost if we prayed like a Cornelius—if we heard the word like the three thousand, and prized it like the eunuch.

II. A Church is only so far a witnessing Church as it is thus baptized with the Holy Ghost. The connection between the two is plainly pointed out in the text: "*Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me.*" The Redeemer does not send skilful orators, but witnesses, such as have seen with spiritual eyes and heard with spiritual ears. A witness must know what he testifies, and he has little liberty to speak of what the Lord has not wrought in him; he believes, and therefore speaks. Witnesses shall testify, while the world stands, of the love of God in Christ—of redemption through his blood, and of the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace. Their sound must go into all the earth; but they do not testify what they have heard, or read, or thought out upon the things of God, for the Holy Ghost gives them a savoury experience of the tidings of great joy which they proclaim to others. Many called ministers have nothing they can testify; for can he be a witness unto Christ, whose heart is not filled with the presence, the love, the life, the Spirit of Christ? Can he be a witness of the cross of Christ, who does not daily look to the dying Lamb for pardon, peace, and cleansing? Can he be a witness of the Lord's abiding with his people to the end of the world, who knows not in his heart a daily in-

tercourse with Jesus—who has not the witness of the Spirit that he is a child of God?

They who have Christ in them, therefore, can alone bring men into living contact with God. Christ makes it plain that a new unction must visit his followers before the blessing spreads to the impenitent; and to look for an awakening, therefore, before we ourselves receive that baptism as with fire, is to expect the end without the means. A Church cannot long continue to display a living testimony, unless this fresh holy baptism is repeatedly renewed; and to hold forth, like many declining Churches of the Reformation, a form of sound words, when the Spirit is sinned away, is but like a removed sign-post carried down a swollen river. For it is not protests, or creeds, or formularies, but living souls under the baptism of the Spirit, that make a witnessing Church. However, not apostles alone, but every believer waited for the Spirit before Pentecost. And nothing, it seems to me, will strike the heart of this callous age, but new holiness in believers' lives—the awe-inspiring spectacle of men glowing with love to their Lord, openly separating from the world. But can those believers be witnesses for Christ, who trifle with the Spirit's presence—who tremble not at decays in holy communion with God—who do not hourly rekindle their torch in God's own presence? Can those believers be really witnesses for Christ, whose life savours of the spirit of the world more than of God—who lie in doubts and fears, with no peace within and no zeal for God? May they not tremble to see how many, by their worldliness, they keep at ease on the brink of an eternal hell?

Why do we so seldom see a Pentecost, a day of the Lord's right hand, when Jesus still lives as Lord, and the Spirit is waiting to descend? Times there are, indeed, when believers are anew baptized with glowing first love, and continue pleading for the salvation of the Christless, as if this were their only work, when breathless assemblies are hushed in death-like stillness before the felt presence of the Lord Jesus; and the awe on every soul is only conquered by the bright joy of reconciled countenances. Times there are, when the sharp arrows of the King pierce many hearts—when heaven and hell seem to open before our face, compelling many to decide amid all men's overwhelming earnestness—when the general feeling is, the Lord is here, and a wide-spread fear prevails lest others should be taken and they be left. But why, O why, are such times so rare? Is it because our desires are so slender, our expectations so narrow? Is it because we too much select the post in which we choose to serve? Is it that, without being hourly led by Jesus as a child is led—without waiting for the Lord's direction—without following his guidance and complying with his Spirit, we trust to our own wisdom and

to our own power—alas! found unavailing in the kingdom of God? “Awake, awake, O arm of the Lord”—awake as in the ancient days, for our toil and study end in nothing. We may yet be far from testifying with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, but who, in reviewing the past, will not exclaim, Had I given the same proportion of my days and nights to prayer which I gave to toil, to other pursuits, or even to study—had I fallen down at the feet of Jesus, pleading for the Holy Ghost, till my lips were touched with fire, and my heart with love—till he shewed me how to do his work, it might have pleased him to make use of me. Had I not run without this unction from on high—had prevailing prayer for the Spirit gone before all my work and followed it, I should not have spent my strength for nought. The review of the past shews what our present course should be; but let us not faint or be discouraged. The disciples were not to testify at all before they were anointed. They would not have succeeded in awakening a soul had they not waited for the shower from heaven. And can we succeed without the precious method that the Saviour has enjoined? Without this fiery unction the disciples were not to go forth; and with child-like dependance on Christ’s grace and power, we too are to follow the same rule. O if we would take him at his word, and let him act! If we waited for the Spirit, should we toil in vain? They only who are chosen vessels, themselves baptized with the Spirit, can preach the gospel with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven—can be unto God a sweet savour of Jesus Christ in them that are saved, and in them that perish. This coming of the Spirit with unction and power, with light and life, made the word quick and powerful, piercing to the dividing of soul and spirit, and discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart. No sooner were the disciples replenished, than others, yea thousands, were inflamed. It was said by the holy Livingston, “There is sometime somewhat in preaching that cannot be ascribed either to the matter or expression, and cannot be described what it is, or from whence it cometh, but with a sweet violence it pierceth into the heart and affections, and cometh immediately from the Lord. But if there be any way to attain to any such thing, it is by the heavenly disposition of the speaker.”

To the same purpose said the heavenly-minded Brainerd, “When ministers feel these special gracious influences on their hearts, it wonderfully assists them to come at the consciences of men, and as it were to handle them. Whereas without them, whatever reason or oratory we make use of, we do but make use of stumps and not of hands.”

Fathers and Brethren, in fulfilling our testimony, this church is in special danger of settling down upon its lees. Is there no danger lest we take the wonderful prosperity of this Church as a compensation for

the spiritual glory of a church? Is there no temptation to be less dependent upon God amidst success—to say my mountain standeth strong—than when apprehensions of unknown evil beset us on every side? The Lord breathes over Israel the affecting complaint, “I remember thee the kindness of thy love, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness; what iniquity have your fathers found in me that they are gone far from me?” And is there no danger lest we too surrender ourselves to carnal slumber, content with past exertions, and enjoying an inglorious repose before the rest of eternity arrive? Is there no risk of beginning in the Spirit, but seeking to be perfect in the flesh? If not watchful unto prayer, may we not ere long be surprised with sleep, and grow weary of well-doing, or give way to a reaction? The eminent Hooker, on embarking to New England with the pilgrim fathers, thus expressed his apprehensions, destined too soon to be realized: “Farewell, England, I expect now no more to see that religious zeal and power of godliness which I have seen among professors in that land. Adversity has slain its thousands, but prosperity its ten thousands. I fear that those who have been zealous Christians in the fire of persecution, will become cold in the lap of peace.” May the Lord keep this Free Church awake at whatever cost!

But another temptation, no less perilous, is the expenditure of time and energy on thankless schemes and delusive enterprizes. Should it not be the answer of this Church to every such allurements, I am engaged in a great work and cannot come down? Perhaps the most powerful temptation with which the enemy can ply this Church, is to cast ourselves down from the pinnacle of the temple, in the presumptuous hope, that, because protected in positions which our Master chose for us, we shall be equally protected in those chosen by ourselves. May we be kept from the seductive idea that we could render better service in some other post than in that which the Omniscient Saviour bids us occupy. It is a blessed discharge from every kind of work that forces us back on this land for which we are especially responsible, till we see the reception of our message. Let schemes be as bright and captivating as they may which divert us from our post, which draw us off, I suspect them, and the quarter whence they come; and while we confess our readiness to fall a sleep at our post, or to be seduced from it, let us at every interval afresh resume our work—let us ever and anon encourage one another to greater love, and zeal, and faith, and prayer—let us fall back afresh on the humiliation, the devotedness, the vows of other days, when we were most sensibly baptised with the Holy Ghost as with fire.

In sending forth this discourse, let me briefly add, that all who have

the Spirit of Christ, ought equally with ministers to stand forth as witnesses, and feel that they are kept for a season on the earth to do a work for God, after their title to the heavenly joys is secured. Would not God's people tremble, if they saw how many their lukewarm lives embolden to abide in sin? God will be with us while we are with him, nor will he withdraw the Spirit till we sin him away. And what if God's own people themselves mar his glorious displays of grace and power in this dark age, because the salt is losing its savour when the land needs it most, and their love is waxing cold through abounding iniquity, when, if ever, it should burn most brightly? Say not, O that a dead world were quickened; but, O that I myself were quickened. Do not many grow weary and faint in their minds, because the example of those most eminent for gifts and graces tends not to encourage, but to dishearten them.

Nor can I omit a call to prayer. When an ardent desire is cherished for the Holy Ghost—when the spirit of extraordinary supplication is poured out from on High—the time to favour Zion, the set time, is come. But the prayer that breaks through the clouds, and opens heaven, asks on a scale no lower than according to God's riches in glory, and expects, with joyous confidence, such great things as Christ's great merits can procure, and as it is God-like and worthy of God to bestow. For all the persons of the Godhead are the more highly honoured by the greatness of the benefits conferred. While God's glory is the highest end in prayer, let us, with believing hearts, hold up the one-prevailing name of Jesus, neither expecting an answer for the inward peace, the enlargement, the fervour of the holiest frame; nor apprehending a denial for an uncomfortable frame, for the merits of that name that prevails with God is evermore the same. Let us look at the prayers in Scripture, and we find that God's glory, the Church's growth and welfare, her holiness and progress, were ever highest in the thoughts and breathings of the saints of God. And if we are animated with any other frame—if that weighs lightly with us that weighs most with God—if our aim does not harmonize with God's in seeking the glory of his name—neither can it be prayer taught by the Spirit, nor prayer offered up in the name of the Son. For the prayer which is of God maketh intercession according to the will of God. (Rom. viii. 27.) The greatest work, perhaps, that some can do for God—and who does not long to do something for him?—is to give him no rest, and never to keep silence, till the Spirit is sent like floods upon the dry ground.

## LECTURE III.

BY THE REV. JOHN C. FAIRBAIRN, ALLANTON.

“ The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.—PSALM xxiii. 1-4.

THE Redeemer's liking, love, and relationship to his people, are represented under manifold striking and comfortable figures. Art thou one of Christ's people? There is no end to thy felicity. Consider well if thou canst lack any good thing. With Christ pledged and wedded to thy soul, what can be wanting to thee? If thou art his, and he thine, thou hast all that can ever be desired. Thou art as precious to him as he is to thee. Art thou blessed in receiving? Christ counts himself as blessed in bestowing. Christ is thy prophet, priest, and king. The functions of each of these offices of his mediatorial character he exercises on thy behalf, and that unceasingly. With the Lord Jesus Christ to instruct thee by his word and spirit—to make intercession for thee at the mercy seat—to rule over and defend thee—to subdue thy spiritual enemies under thee—thy portion is a good one. Thou mayest, and must complain of the treachery of thine own heart, but never of him who has redeemed thy soul. Christ thy head—thou a member of his mystical body—he will care for thee. No man ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it. Christ is more careful of the members of his body than a man is of his own flesh. Christ is the true vine, thou a branch of it, thou shalt have thy share of nourishment. See that thou art a true, a fruit-bearing branch. Such branches the Father purgeth that they may bring forth more fruit. The barren branches are cut off and cast aside to be burned. There are many such always hanging about the true vine, but never truly grafted in—dead branches—professing Christians. If thou art such thou shalt perish, unless thou gettest thyself truly grafted in. If a living, fruit-bearing branch, thou shalt be cared for, and have a due portion of nourishment from the root and stem

on which thou growest. Christ is thy elder brother. He sticketh closer than a brother. He is a faster friend than any brother can be to thee. He is an elder brother, who has at heart the interests of all his brethren. He divides the inheritance amongst them. He purchased it with his precious blood for his brethren. Each shall have his portion—thou thine, if thou art his. What an inheritance Christ shares amongst his brethren! Whatever blessings God has to bestow, and thy soul is capable of receiving. Not now, for thou canst not now get the inheritance in all its fulness. A part of it now—the fulness of it when thou comest to the stature of a perfect man in Christ Jesus—when he has perfected his own image upon thee, and infinitely enlarged the spiritual desires and capabilities of thy soul. Christ is your advocate with the Father. In the heavenly places he is a prevailing intercessor. His plea cannot be resisted. What he gets for his people he gets not of grace, but of right. He has purchased for them, whatever he gets for them. The inheritance is Christ's by right of purchase. He gives it to his people out of mere grace, but he obtained it for them by the bitter travail of his soul. Art thou one of his? he pleads for thee day and night without ceasing: when thou art awake, when thou art asleep, when thou thinkest of him, when thou thinkest not of him. manifold are the relationships in which Christ stands to his people. All of them full of comfort. Wells in the wilderness overflowing with living water. Drink deep, the well cannot be exhausted. Though the whole world were to drink, the spring would still overflow with living water.

In this psalm, Christ is shewn as a shepherd. Why speak at large on the duties of a shepherd? Most know what these are. He must care for the flock. In calm, and in tempest, by night and by day, in summer and in winter, he must care for it, feed it, protect it, keep it from wandering, keep it from famine, keep it from the paw of the wolf and the lion. Even in this country a shepherd's work is arduous; much more arduous in many other countries. In no country is it an idle, dreamy, sentimental life.

Christ is the shepherd of Israel. "Give ear, O shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph as a flock, thou that dwellest between the Cherubims, shine forth." He is the good and watchful shepherd. "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine." He gathers the flock when it has been scarred and scattered. "Hear the word of the Lord, O ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock."

The fact that Christ is the shepherd of Israel, the good and faithful shepherd, continually watching over his people, is not enough for the Psalmist. He gets much nearer to Christ than that. No true comfort, no sure peace with God, is to be had from a distant, unrealizing view of Christ. We must be personally interested in Christ, if we would know him in the power of his salvation. Many have had, and any one may have, a distant view of Christ, and of the glory and excellency of his work, without having a personal interest in him. They have beheld, wondered, and perished. Balaam could see the glory and Divine beauty of "the Star of Jacob." He could see the glory of Christ, and of Christ's work, and the blessed portion of Christ's people. Seeing it he was constrained to admire it and commend it. "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel. As the vallies are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side. He couched, he lay down as a lion, as a great lion; who shall stir him up? Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee." The preaching of the gospel, of the excellency of Christ and his salvation, was pleasant to the ears of the stony-ground hearers. They could have sat all day to listen to it. Their ears were ravished, and their eyes were dazzled. They heard the word, and rejoiced in it. Nothing was half so pleasant to their hearing as the blessings unfolded in the Gospel—nothing so ravishing to their sight as the beauty of Christ. Balaam and the stony-ground hearers rested there. They got a far off view of Christ, but not a personal interest in him. Even the lost souls, if they can get a glimpse of paradise, as the rich man did, cannot but discern its excellence and admire it, but only to the increasing of their torment. Rest not content with such far off views of Christ—rest content with nothing short of a personal interest in him. The Psalmist invokes the Lord as the shepherd of Israel; also as *his* shepherd—there the comfort lay. "The Lord is my shepherd." You must get as near to Christ, or you can have no comfort, no saving benefit from him.

The Psalmist concludes, from the Lord being his shepherd, that he would not want. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." Being sure of Christ, he could come to no other conclusion. A soul thoroughly converted—strong in the faith—assured that God will abide by his word, must be shut up to this comfortable conclusion. Is there any good thing that the Lord has not included in his promises? Has he power to do as he has promised? Is he faithful to do as he has promised? If these conditions hold—to what other conclusion can a ransomed soul come? With Christ promising—almighty, faithful—the believer cannot well sail for any other port. What promises has God made! Surely each promise contains abundant blessings. Far more



copiousness of blessing than any one is aware of, till put upon the trial. The believer can exhaust none of the promises here. The utmost comfort he gets of any of them here is but a small portion compared with the inexhaustible fulness of it. Each promise contains much. All the promises taken together contain whatsoever the regenerated soul can fancy or desire of spiritual good. The believer cannot name a blessing which is not wrapped up in some one promise, or in the full bosom of all the promises. If any one thinks that his case in some one aspect of it is not provided for in the promises, let him attentively examine the matter. Let him make inquiry about all his wants, that no want escape notice, so far as it may be known. Let him take the Word of God, and examine the promises, and see if his wants are not all anticipated there. They are much more than anticipated. Do they not bring many blessings you never thought of, and quicken many desires that lay quiet within you? No believer has at any moment of his life a full perception of all he stands in need of. He sees but a little way. His wants are discovered to him one by one, as the dispensations of Providence shift his circumstances, and place him in new and unimagined positions. He will find every want as it arises provided for in the abounding fulness of the promises. He will discover that Christ has been beforehand with him—considering all his case, and arranging for it. If there is not in the promises the specific blessing which at the time you stand in need of, your case differs from that of all the other children of God. Granting that you cannot discover, specifically set down, the precise blessing you need, do not conclude that it is not in the mind of the Lord to bestow it upon you. If you cannot find it at the moment, yet remember it is there. You will discover it at another time. Meanwhile support your soul with this—"All things are yours; for you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters." The word, ordinances, and providence of God—all by which he graciously reveals himself to his people—are to be esteemed as green pastures and still waters. All believers have found them such. Through these Christ reveals his loveliness to them, and fills their souls with ardent longings after him. It should be much of our concern to watch and mark what improvement we make in divine ordinances—whether we are growing in grace, getting more of the spirit of holiness, and truly enjoying God in his ordinances. All events in Providence are so devised, shaped, and brought about by the infinite wisdom, and in the abounding love of Christ, as to minister to the good of his people. The good is often not apparent to them: it often lies hidden from them; it often appears evil to them. Often they cannot

see how good should accrue to them out of such and such dispensations : they cannot see one beam of light in them, nor feel one glow of warmth : they see nothing but darkness, and can conjecture nothing but evil. Every thing, so far as man's eye can reach, and man's reason comprehend, is arrayed against them in fierce, uncompromising battle order. "All these things are against us," is their language, and it comes from the heart. It requires strong faith on the part of God's people to believe that every thing is ordered for their good. When faith is required to witness against feeling, much of it is needful. And it is often necessitated so to witness. As faith has always to combat with sense, so it has often to combat with feeling. With sense faith has always to maintain a conflict—"We walk by faith, not by sight." Were we to walk by sense, to be guided to our conclusions by its dictates, we would abandon faith, which looks to, and walks by, what is above sense. The world walks by sight, and the things of faith are incomprehensible mysteries to it. Sense concludes against all that cannot be seen, tasted, handled, demonstrated, &c.—against all which to its nature is impalpable and inappreciable. Faith leaves sense to its own narrow sphere of measurable things, and goes beyond it into far other regions. Its life and enjoyment lie in the apprehension and cleaving to things which are quite beyond the range of sense, and to whose existence, or the remotest traces of it, sense is blind, dead, impervious. At a death-bed sense sees nothing, hears nothing, but the decay of the body, the subsiding of the pulse of life, the sighs and moanings of departing animation. It sees nothing of the soul departing uninjured from the body ; has no glimpses of the future world ; the dawning of eternity upon the black night of our mortal life pierces not its dusky eye-sight : it beholds not the presence of God, the glories or terrors of his judgment seat ; feels little of appreciable difference between the death of a man and the death of a beast. Faith beholds these things. These are its realities. It sinks the sensible, and fixes upon the super-sensible. The realities of sense are to faith a vapour of smoke intervening between it and the real and actual, dimming them, but affecting them in no other respect.

As faith has to maintain a conflict with sense, so often also with feeling. A believer cast down, as the Psalmist often was, into darkness and great depths, having the great billows of terror, anguish, and divine judgment tossing round his soul, and breaking over it, requires much faith to believe against present feeling and experience, that all is well-ordered, all for his good, his real and permanent advantage. Yet it is so. When brought to the point where all the dealings of God with his soul meet and converge, he will admire the beauty and order of them all, see a hun-

dred mysteries unravelled, and be satisfied that he was walking in the sunlight when, at the time, it was all darkness to him.

Faith and experience should walk hand in hand, not crossing and thwarting each other, but side by side. It is uncomfortable walking to a child of God when it is not so. The believer's salvation rests not on his own experience, but in Christ's work, and his interest in it. God looks not to the believer's experience. He looks to the believer as he is in Christ Jesus. This should comfort believers in seasons of trial, when doubts and fears arise and prevail for a season. But it should not make them slack or negligent in striving and seeking for more and more of a gracious experience. It should strengthen their confidence in Christ, but render them no whit less jealous of themselves. A gracious experience of the presence and favour of God is of unspeakable importance. Believers under trial of darkness and perplexity have been thrown into great alarm, and cried out to God that they cannot live without the sense of his presence with them, and that they must have it. Where Christ is in the soul the hope of glory, there will be manifestations and tokens of his being there. Christ dwelling by his Spirit within the soul cannot but make his indwelling in it manifest to the soul. It will often happen that this manifestation will be in the way of troubling the soul for sin, spiritual sloth, unfaithfulness, moving great struggles of conscience on account of these; yet not always so. There will be seasons of deep, inexpressible communings of love between the soul and Christ—shinings out of the glory of Christ upon the soul, to its ineffable comfort and joy—possession of the peace of God which passes understanding. The holier, tenderer, and more God-ward the walk, the more of such gracious experience. In such seasons, the care of Christ will very plainly be seen, and deeply felt; the soul will distinctly know that the Shepherd of Israel is leading it in green pastures, and beside the still waters.

“He restoreth my soul.” He goes out after it when it has wandered from the fold and pasture into the wilderness. The wandering habits of sheep are well known—a fitting emblem of believers. They often wander in vain ways—out of the richest pasture the Lord has provided for them, into the desert where there is no pasture, and no rest for the sole of the foot, into the wilderness of vain thoughts, of wicked, doubting, unbelieving thoughts, from thicket to thicket, still farther astray. The world allures them, and they draw after it. It spreads a magic scene before them, making its dross to shine and sparkle as if it were gold and precious gems. And they are taken in the snare like foolish insects in a spider's web. It will often happen to the traveller, that, after the falling rains have bemired all the ways, and sloughed them

over with clay and mud pools, the whole path before him glistens and shines as if it were spangled with innumerable lustrous gems. Behind he sees it bedaubed in mire, but before it is all a blaze with radiance. Ten thousand mimic sunbeams brandish and interweave their light. A like art has the god of this world to deck out the world's vanities. We pursue them, and grasp at them, and fill our bosom with them, and behold they are vanity. Still the path glistens before us, and we push on for farther trial to secure a booty—on and on, till, awakened to our folly by some warning sent home to us from the Scriptures, or some sharp stroke of Providence, we bemoan ourselves, observing how we have despised God's mercies, and thrust out so far from his presence. The prodigal son, when he came to himself, resolved to return to his father's house, and cast himself on his father's mercy. It was death to remain where he was; to return could, at the worst, be death; we know what reception he had. It is to teach sinners to return to God, and to encourage them to return with the assurance of a gracious reception. God's love exceeds that of the father in the parable. God not only waits to be gracious—he sends out into the wilderness, the far country, after his wandering children. If he does so to invite unbelieving sinners to come to him, much more does Christ, when any of his people stray from the fold, hasten out after them to fetch them back. He will chastise and afflict them for their sins, but he will not forsake them. They are too precious to him. He purchased them at too dear a price to part with them. He restoreth their souls.

The provision made by Christ for his people is so full and complete, and he is always so ready to bestow his blessing upon them, that, but for their own carelessness, sloth, and sin, they need at no time be in straits. To exhort believers to rejoice in the Lord, and to set before them the grounds of their joy, is of good use for many ends, and chiefly to stir them up to seek after greater advances in holy walking, and communing with God; but to insinuate that believers shall have nothing but joy and comfort here below, were vain talk, and wide of all Christian experience. Our Lord exhorts his people to be of good cheer, for he has overcome the world; but at the same time certifies them that in the world they shall have tribulation. There is no record in Scripture of any believer having had uninterrupted spiritual comfort here below. Often in great joy, but not in continual, uninterrupted joy. In what confusion and perplexity of spirit do we often find believers—thrust down into what dismal and death-like places? How often was the Psalmist at his wits' end, through fear and trembling? How often plunged, as it were, to the lowest bottom of the deep, kept down there with the terrors of the Almighty passing over him? "O Lord, rebuke

me not in thy wrath, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure. For thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore. There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger, neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin." "Innumerable evils have compassed me about; mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of my head, therefore my heart faileth me." And so in many other passages. And as with the Psalmist, so with others of God's servants whose experience Scripture records. Out of such fearful troubles and depression of soul there was none to deliver the Psalmist. Man's help was of no avail. As well try to draw out Leviathan with a hook. He could no more deliver himself, than if he had been lying under weight of the mountains. Beyond the reach of all other help, the Lord remembers him, stretches down his hand, lifts him, restores his soul. The Lord's people are often called upon to praise him in the words of Jonah, "The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever, yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God!"

Having restored the souls of his people, Christ leads them in the paths of righteousness—in the statutes, ordinances, and commandments of God. Except in these, there is no safe walking. All other paths are confused, and lead to confusion. Even godless sinners may know this, if they would consult their own experience. They have no true peace in the ways where they walk. They can have none. These are paths of destruction—they lead to death—they take hold of hell.

In the fourth verse, the Psalmist comforts himself still more in his Redeemer. The believer, walking in the fear of God, and doing his utmost to keep his heart and steps from the ways of temptation, cannot make too great demands upon the grace and favour of God. All that he has to ask is short of what God has promised. The Psalmist now comforts himself not only from the review of God's merciful dealing with him hitherto, but looks forward with confidence for the time to come. Whilst he has any being, he expects to be praising the Lord for his mercies. He here anticipates and tries to realize the time when he should be called on to depart this life. This Paul also did, who declares concerning himself, that he died daily. He speaks of the valley of the shadow of death, and of his passing through it. If we could follow his thoughts whither they have now gone, and get a glimpse, by anticipation, of our own walking through this valley of the shadow of death, we might see our need of having Christ for our guide and comforter there. It is a dark and dismal place—to the mere natural apprehen-

sion the most terrible place except hell. It is overshadowed with fears, and haunted with innumerable horrors—full of snares and plagues. We then come into frightful terrors and bewilderment, where there is no peace, and can be none, except Christ be with us. We have come within the shadow of eternity. We are going, breath by breath, step by step, out of this state of things, so familiar to us and so fondly cherished. The sun has gone down beneath the horizon, the light of this world is fading from our eye. We have gotten shoaled and shelved, cast up out of this our native element upon the shore of an unexplored world. Our senses, which brought us into contact with terrestrial things, have no occupation here. They bring us no intimations. They cannot lay their hands upon the objects of the eternal world. The objects of time are left behind. They have, to our seeming, changed their nature. They have become shadows. Many other things make death terrible. Sin and Satan lurk and work in the shadow of death. The sins of men's lives start up to scar them and increase and intensify their fearful apprehensions. They had forgotten their sins, had supposed they were dead and buried, no more to be seen or heard of. They had only gone before them to judgment, to meet them again in this evil place, to haunt their steps and pursue them to the judgment seat. This sudden onset of sin has driven many to despair in passing through the valley of the shadow of death; and occasioned even to many a redeemed soul, whose sins were all pardoned, a season of inexpressible anguish of spirit, though before their departure the cloud has passed away, and the sunshine and calm returned. Satan is busy with his temptations here—nowhere busier, shooting his bolts on every side, wounding the soul, and making it pass through a shower of fire. God often lets loose all his terrors here against the wicked, so that they are utterly confounded. It is all horror, and darkness, and conflict, and struggle. To the awakened but unconverted sinner, death is ineffably dreadful. The believer would sink helpless were he left to himself.

The Psalmist could contemplate the terrors of death. All passed before his mind. He left none of them out. He looked not with a careless eye—not with a kind of glance which men will now and then throw sidelong at some evil in their path, which must one day be met, but which being yet at some distance, they are glad to look more sparingly at its dark, than at its hopeful side. He knew what was to be met, encountered, struggled with, in death. In the face of all death's terrors, he concludes, "I shall fear no evil." His reason is, "for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." Christ goes with his people through the whole journey of life, and does not forsake them at

death. He draws near them then. Whatever the sinner trusted in, leaves them here—whatever the sinner feared, meets him here—whatever the believer feared, by and by, leaves him here. Christ takes him by the hand and leads him through—Christ has conquered the terrors of death and hell. They stand in awe of Christ. They crouch down before him, content if he pass without lifting his staff against them. In his hand the believer is safe, and shall be brought in peace to his expected end.

## LECTURE IV.

BY THE REV. JOHN MONTGOMERY, INNERLEITHEN.

“Hear my prayer, O Lord; give ear to my supplications: in thy faithfulness answer me, and in thy righteousness. And enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified. For the enemy hath persecuted my soul; he hath smitten my life down to the ground: he hath made me to dwell in darkness, as those that have been long dead. Therefore is my spirit overwhelmed within me; my heart within me is desolate. I remember the days of old; I meditate on all thy works; I muse on the work of thy hands. I stretch forth my hands unto thee; my soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land. Selah. Hear me speedily, O Lord; my spirit faileth: hide not thy face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit. Cause me to hear thy loving kindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust; cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee. Deliver me, O Lord, from mine enemies: I flee unto thee to hide me. Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness. Quicken me, O Lord, for thy name's sake: for thy righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble. And of thy mercy cut off mine enemies, and destroy all them that afflict my soul; for I am thy servant.”—PSALM cxliii.

THIS Psalm is adapted to a time of trial. Believers have joys unknown to other men; and although they share with other men in common sorrows and calamities, they have also distresses peculiar to themselves, “The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.” But the present time is a time of many sufferings. “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation;” but it is no strange thing that happens to us when we are tried with a fiery trial.

“All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” “To die is gain.” Perhaps it is sometimes more difficult, and requires a greater exercise of faith to assure ourselves, concerning some of the trials of life, that they work for good to us, than to assure ourselves of this concerning death—more difficult to look with resignation and complacency on some of God's providential dispensations, than to look forward with complacency and hope to the hour of death. And there are trials more fiery than even the losses and bereavements which Christians so keenly feel, and by which they are made practically acquainted with the preciousness of Christ, the riches of his grace, the greatness of his promises, the blissfulness of his fellowship, and the abundant consolations of the Holy Ghost—more fiery than even losses and bereavements such as often drive



the unchastened spirits of ungodly men to the madness of despair. "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." Christ's people are hated by the wicked; and which of them has never felt it hard to bear the calumny and scorn wherewith their enemies have persecuted them when hatred had no other way to vent itself, no other means by which to persecute; and when they knew that the rack and the dungeon, the stake and the gibbet, were not at present to be feared—when, it may be, even their worldly fortunes seemed secure against all the assaults of unbelieving malignity? Nay, it seems as if our Lord intimated that this must often be felt by his followers to be one of the most intolerable forms of persecution—apart from others, itself a fiery trial—conjoined with others, an aggravation of their worst intensity—a trial in which there is especial need of heavenly consolation—when he said in his Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you." But torment of conscience is worse than all the calamities of life—worse than all the suffering that the hands of the persecutor can inflict—worse than all the pain that backbitings and whisperings can cause. "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear? David strongly expresses this in the thirty-second Psalm, where he says, "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture is turned into the drought of summer." And in many other places of the Book of Psalms, he describes in like manner the anguish of his soul; for instance, in the fifty-first Psalm, when he speaks of the bones which God hath broken. And with less explicit reference to affliction of his conscience, or to his transgressions as the cause of that spiritual anguish which he endures, he often expresses himself in language otherwise very similar, and apparently proceeding from a very similar distress. For instance, in the forty-second Psalm—"As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me, while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God?" And in the Psalm now under our consideration, verses three and four—"For the enemy hath persecuted my soul; he hath smitten my life down to the ground; he hath made me to dwell in darkness, as those that have been long dead. Therefore is my spirit overwhelmed within me; my heart within me is desolate." Let it not be imagined that distress of conscience is felt by unbelievers alone. David was a believer when he endured it; he had experienced and escaped from it, and yet he fell into it again. You are not safe

from all danger of this distress till beyond the reach of temptation, and beyond all possibility of transgression.

We must also reflect, that wicked men are not the only persecutors of the saints of God. Wicked men are slaves and minions of the devil. He himself is the great persecutor—our adversary, who, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour—the accuser of the brethren, who accuseth them before God day and night. And wicked men are not the only agents whom he employs to carry on his work. He has other legions at least as malignant as they. “We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” The victory is promised to the believer, yet there may be many temporary reverses in that protracted warfare, many a fall in that incessant conflict, ere we shall be made more than conquerors through him that loved us, and shall rise to an eternal triumph, or rather, shall be raised by him who is for us, and who is greater than all they that can be against us, and who will place us where we can be assailed no more. There may be many hours of gloom and fear even after the first dawn of heavenly light has gladdened the soul, even after the rays of the Sun of Righteousness have kindled it to raptures of holy joy—much walking in darkness after God has shined in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ. Clouds may interpose: our beloved may withdraw himself and be gone, and we may be constrained to exclaim—Oh, that I knew where I might find him ! It may seem as though sin had for ever separated between us and our God. David was not unlike all other believers in his experience when he cried, “How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord ? for ever ? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me ?” Trouble of conscience may arise (as we see from the thirty-second psalm) upon commission of sin ; the Lord may hide his face from us, and seem to forget us, when we have for a while forgotten him ; he may deal with us as with the Israelites of old, when he said to them (as we read in the tenth chapter of the Book of Judges), “Go, and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen ; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation.” Or he may graciously appoint to try us in this way with interruption of his sensible fellowship, in order that we may be excited to seek him with increased earnestness, and so attain to a higher spirituality, and enjoy his fellowship more perfectly than before ; or in order that we may be brought to acknowledge with more perfect cordiality our absolute dependence on his sovereign grace. Or distress may be caused by temptation, whilst yet this, with all things, shall work for good to us under God’s control and

by his fatherly care ; wicked men and devils may be permitted to assail us, and so far to prevail, as much to distress us by temptations to abhorred iniquity, and to cast us into doubt by false accusations, so that we know not well what to say, or what to think, when they cry against us, Where is thy God?

It would seem that the psalm now before us was composed in a time of trial. It is suited to such a time. Perhaps it was the utterance at once of David's piety and of his distress, when he fled from the face of his own son Absalom, in midst of afflictions strangely multiplied and aggravated ; when his prosperity was changed all at once into adversity ; when his heart was lacerated by the conduct of Absalom ; when he was an exile from Jerusalem, and could no longer go up with the multitude that kept holiday into the house of God, whose courts he loved ; when every circumstance reminded him of his own worst offences now visited with chastisement ; and when (as may well be supposed,) Satan took advantage of all these distresses, and seized the opportunity to cast in a flood of atheistical suggestions, and to fill the soul with darkness, and doubt, and fear.

Nothing is more certain than that believers may attain to an assurance of their own salvation ; and yet, it is evident that believers may have very many anxieties, and very many doubts and fears. Nay, even those who have attained to an assurance of their own salvation, may be caused to pass through old trials again ; and doubt and fear and anxiety may return after they have been gone, and, as we fancied, gone for ever. We cannot stay at present to investigate the causes by which the soul's assurance is thus disturbed, nor the variety of conditions under which such disturbance may take place ; but let us observe how impossible it is to affix any meaning to the expressions of the Psalmist in the psalm before us, unless it be admitted that a peaceful, joyful assurance of salvation is attainable, and that, after it has been attained, doubts and fears may yet arise in the soul of the believer.

With respect to this assurance, there are two extremes of opinion both to be avoided. On the one hand, it is imagined by some, that a man is not in a state of salvation, unless the assurance of that salvation be enjoyed—that there is no real faith in his soul unless he be ready to say, "I know that I believe in Christ ; I know that I am accepted by God ; I know that I am on the way to heaven." On the other hand, there are some who, perceiving this notion to be unscriptural, and to be fraught with very dangerous consequences, fall into an error which perhaps is not less dangerous, and either take for granted, that an

assurance of salvation is unattainable, or that it is presumption in ordinary Christians to think of attaining it. These are important errors—much evil perpetually flows from each of them. If it be asserted that there is no saving faith without the present knowledge and assurance of salvation, then Christians, already weak and weary, are still further distressed; even those who have been borne up till they felt that they were really in heavenly places, mounting as on eagle's wings, and singing praises in holy ecstasy as they arose into the serene pure air, where for a while they have enjoyed the beatific sunshine of the Saviour's countenance, may be troubled by such doctrine, for they have a sweet remembrance still of these heavenly joys; yet now, it is not with them as it was with them in such favoured moments—their wings have flagged, and their soaring spirits have sunk again—and now again they are tossed about by the stormy winds of earthly passion, full of disquietudes and cares, from which, for a while, they were exempt, and which, in midst of their joy, they had forgotten, and compelled to cry, like Paul, "O, wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" And, scarcely able to add, like him, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord,"—they are still more enfeebled and distressed by this doctrine, which tempts them to think that their former experience of joy and peace may have been all a delusion. It tends to sink them deeper in the dark waters in which they are now struggling; whilst on others, perhaps weaker in the faith than they, who have never experienced such joy, its effect is, if possible, even more deadly, and the hope which had begun to spring up in their hearts is rudely quenched. Satan comes in disguise as a messenger of God, and, professing nothing but anxiety for their salvation, more effectually troubles their souls by his feigned voice of kindness than he could by all the bellowsings of hell. Nor is the injury less serious which results to those who look with greatest contempt upon that weak, trembling, flickering hope which seems so easily put out. This doctrine disheartens many a true believer, but it also encourages many a vain pretender. And I know few spectacles more melancholy than that of the man who, supposing faith in Christ to be an easy thing, gives his heartless assent to a statement of doctrine, which it pleases him to designate the gospel, and forthwith concluding himself to be in a state of salvation, boasts of his faith, and speaks as if he were unquestionably on the road to heaven, whilst there is nothing heaven-like about his character, and no evidence of faith whatever except that boastful profession and the supercilious air with which he compassionates those who dare not boast like himself. I know not what delusion is more hopeless and desperate; when such a case is cured, it is

in truth a marvellous illustration of the sovereignty of grace, and the power of God.

But if, on the other hand, men take it for granted that assurance is not attainable, or at least that the attainment of it is not to be expected on their part, the result is very deplorable. For, if the man who falls into such error be a Christian, he is debarred from many of the highest enjoyments of the Christian life, from enjoyments with which great attainments in holiness are connected, and which, in some measure, are even indispensable to such attainments; many of the Christian's privileges are known to him only in name; he is prevented from rendering proper obedience to the commandment, "Rejoice in the Lord;" he is withheld from glorifying God as he might and as he ought; he is kept walking in darkness when he might walk in light. His influence for good amongst his fellow men is grievously diminished. Indeed, it is hard to see how such a notion can consist with much zeal in the cause of Christ; most probably the Christian who entertains it is but a very worldly Christian still, and worldly men are encouraged by what they hear from his lips, in their own opinion, that it is not necessary to be at much trouble about religion—they are encouraged to think that they have done enough and gone far enough when they have got the length of saying without dishonesty that they hope Jesus Christ will be their Saviour, and that they shall go to heaven. The devil will not readily disturb them in such peace, nor quench such hope; such peace and hope are really the works of the devil. And surely there is every reason to doubt the religion of those men who are contented to want assurance of their own salvation; nay, if they are quite contented, their Christianity may very safely be denied. What, if perhaps some Christians are very carnal and lethargic; and if perhaps some man so carnal and lethargic that you see no more than some faint sign of spiritual life, may, after all, be in a state of grace—are you to be contented to be as the worst and as the weakest? Are you to comfort yourselves with the thought of your resemblance to them? You think it possible that one may be a Christian who is sunk in a certain wretched lethargy—but oh! how worthless is the hope you found upon such an imagined possibility! You are like those who flatter themselves with the expectation of a death-bed repentance. When men seem contented to want assurance of their own salvation, may we not think it is because they do not even believe heaven and hell to be realities? How can we suppose that they have any proper sense of sin, or that the cross of Christ and the Day of Judgment have any considerable place in their thoughts, or any considerable influence over their hearts? No, my friends, the man may be

a Christian who still has much doubt, and anxiety, and fear ; but there is the greatest reason to conclude favourably of the real Christianity of *him* who is most desirous to obtain assurance, most distressed for the want of it, and most unremitting in the use of all the means of grace in order that it may be obtained. Suppose not that it is unattainable—suppose not that only apostles, and prophets, and martyrs, and men of distinction in the Church of Christ, have attained it—suppose not that it is a gift so rare and peculiar that it is not to be sought in the use of any ordinary means of grace, but comes unexpected, like the gift of prophecy, and visions, and revelations, which came suddenly to holy men of old ; but suppose that every step onward in the Christian course is a step towards its most perfect attainment. To *you* it is said, “ Give diligence to make your calling and election sure.” Press toward the mark, like Paul, and think not of pausing till you can say, like him, “ I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.” Nor will you think of pausing then—certainly not *then* ; you will then be less apt than now to be contented with attainments made, or to imagine that you have attained as much as is attainable—you will be more earnest than now in still pressing on and seeking the way to Zion with your faces thitherward.

But observe now, brethren, how the Psalmist in this psalm speaks to God as *his* God. Even when he is much depressed—much tempted to doubt and to despond—he resists the devil—he refuses to yield—he strives to banish doubt and despondency—he resolutely says, “ I will not despair ;” and he looks up to God as he makes, and piously utters the resolution. There is many a common error on the subject of assurance, to which we have not time at present to attend, but one which is very common is forced upon our notice, by the striking contrast of the Psalmist’s conducted as exhibited in this psalm. How often do we see that when temptations come, and doubts arise in the soul, men yield at once, they prostrate themselves on the ground, and can hardly be roused to any exertion ? It is well that the hope which is in believers cannot die ; for when Satan’s temptations are powerful, and he presses them hard with arguments, they sometimes seem to be themselves determined that it shall not live. Now it is positively sinful to give way to despondency ; and what is despair but rebellion against God ? See what David did when he was assailed with temptations of this nature : he cried out of the depths, he stretched out his hands unto God, he laid hold of the covenant, he laid hold of God as *his* God. Remember Jacob, how he wrestled all night with the angel of the Lord, how “ he wept and made supplication unto him.” It is a grievous complaint, indeed, which

the eighty-eighth Psalm contains, but it is a complaint *to God*, and it begins with the words, "O Lord, God of my salvation." Consider the forty-second Psalm; hear how David says "O my God." Consider how he strives to encourage himself in the Lord, even when he seems to find it very difficult: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him who is the health of my countenance and my God." And now look into this psalm before us: consider particularly the tenth verse, "Teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God;" or the twelfth verse, "I am thy servant;" or the eighth verse, "In thee do I trust." Or consider the first verse—it really illustrates this point as well as any verse in the psalm, though to perceive it a little more attention may be necessary. Consider the appeal to faithfulness and righteousness, "Hear my prayer, O Lord; give ear to my supplications; in thy faithfulness answer me, and in thy righteousness." What appeal can be made to the righteousness or to the faithfulness of God, unless we confess him as *our* God?

But, again, consider what it is to confess God as our God. There is no other way of confessing him at all. This is not necessarily the language of assurance. I mean that it is not necessarily the language of a man having assurance of his own salvation. It is rather the language of appropriating faith. It is the language of a man putting in his claim, uttering forth his desire, and endeavouring to give effect to that desire, stretching out his hand to grasp the hand that is stretched out for his salvation. It is fit language, indeed, for one to use who enjoys assurance; but of itself it is not sufficient to show that assurance is enjoyed; and it must be borne in mind that assurance of salvation is never enjoyed when faith is not in exercise: it requires that *assurance of faith* which is often confounded with it, but which is really a very different thing; and the language of assured salvation is still the language of appropriation, of appropriating faith. But there is a great difference, my friends, betwixt saying *to God*, "Thou art my God," and saying *to men* that we know him to be our God. I need no previous assurance of salvation to warrant me in saying to God, "Thou art my God"—nay, I need no previous remembered faith; but, on the mere warrant of God's word addressed to me, I may go to him now in faith, and going to him in faith, I may, and in reality I must, call upon him as my God: for in the act of calling upon him, I must take him to be my God; without this there is no calling upon him at all; until I do this I still refuse to submit myself to him, and am a resolute rebel. With my heart I must call upon him as my God, even if thoughts arise within me which check the

utterance of the words as they come to my lips; and I am bound also without delay to confess God before men, and thus also before men I must say that he is my God, intending by this to tell them that I now seek him, devote myself to him, and renounce all idols which I have worshipped. The humble believer is often very bold in doing this, whilst still most anxious and uncertain about his own salvation. But it is quite a different thing to say to men that I know God to be my God, and implies an assurance of my acceptance and of my salvation. And many a one who, like David, says to God, "Thou art my God"—thus with his heart receiving Christ as he is offered in the gospel, and giving himself to Christ without reserve—may yet be far from feeling himself warranted to say to his fellow-men that he knows God to be his God indeed.

But the expressions used by David in the Psalm before us are not all capable of being regarded as the mere expressions of appropriating faith. There is an evident reflection upon the past, and a struggle not only against the temptation to doubt the present favour of God, but also against the temptation to doubt the reality of former spiritual peace and joy. It is true, however, that in the soul's struggle against despondency, and against the temptation to despair, the exercise of faith is indeed that in which it is chiefly employed.

Perhaps the first verse of this Psalm may be regarded as indicative of the depth of that distress into which David was sunk at this time, and of the strength of those temptations of unbelief with which he was assailed. He seems as if he felt some difficulty in bringing himself to think that God would hear him, or in bringing his heart to a state of feeling accordant with this just judgment of his mind. Knowing that God is truly near and ready to hear, he yet feels as if God were far away, as if sin had completely separated betwixt him and his God; and therefore he calls urgently upon the Lord to hear his prayer, and to give ear to his supplications, ere he goes on to make his appeal to the faithfulness and to the righteousness of the Lord. "Hear my prayer, O Lord; give ear to my supplications: in thy faithfulness answer me, and in thy righteousness." If your distress be deep, you will see such deep distress exhibited in the Psalms of David, and you will see how he found relief.

I do not suppose this appeal to the faithfulness and to the righteousness of God to be made with reference merely to David's human enemies, and the justice of his cause in his strife with them, though this explanation, which has been sometimes given, may be no otherwise incorrect than as it is imperfect. No doubt David might well plead thus,



and entreat God to arise and plead his own cause—for the cause of God's people is God's own cause—and the church may use such language now, and plead thus with God in the midst of her contendings. It is true that in the next verse David confesses himself a sinner, who cannot stand in his own righteousness. And even so must we. Every man is guilty, and the church is guilty: except as by the blood of Christ that guilt is washed away, and, the righteousness of Christ being imputed, God seeth no iniquity in Jacob nor perverseness in Israel. But in our contendings with our fellow-men our cause may still be a righteous cause. Our sins may have been great and many; there may be much corruption in our hearts; but their accusations are not the less malevolent and false. And even when their rage is made to accomplish God's purpose of grace in the chastisement of his people's sins, their rage is still wicked, and the cause of God's people is still, as it respects them, a righteous cause. But if the Psalmist thus prayed with reference to his human enemies, not less properly may such prayer be made with reference to spiritual enemies; and surely spiritual enemies distressed him most, and the voice of Shimei, which David heard as he fled from Absalom, was not the most afflictive in its accusations. Many may rise up against us, and seek to destroy us, but how delightful to think that we may flee unto God to hide us—that we may pray to him for help, and may appeal to his faithfulness and righteousness! How precious is that truth, and how necessary as a foundation for all assurance of salvation, that God's faithfulness consists not with the destruction of any whom he has called in his grace—of any who have truly called upon his name! What comfort could we have even in the contemplation of mercy and grace—or what could we know of mercy and grace—unless we were assured that “if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness?” But, knowing this, we may compare the multitude of God's mercies with the multitude of our sins, and still rejoice in hope. Very humbly does the Psalmist speak in the second verse of this psalm—“Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thysight shall no man living be justified.” I think this second verse leads us to a more complete view of the meaning of the first. It is not merely with reference to the rage of any enemies whatsoever that David appeals to the faithfulness and righteousness of God—it is not merely with reference to the falsehood of their accusations; but when he pleads against the hosts of earth and hell, he derives his confidence, or his hope, from a view of God's righteousness and God's faithfulness as glorified in Christ, and therefore glorified in his salvation. If enemies were out of the question alto-

gether, there would still be an undiminished necessity for looking to these attributes of God. It is with reference to himself, *only as in himself considered*, that the Psalmist uses the language of the second verse. If he had not known of a perfect satisfaction to justice, and a perfect justification of sinners such as he, what would an appeal to God's righteousness have been but a daring insult, an invocation of wrath, a petition that he might instantly be cast into hell? But David looked to him for whose righteousness' sake God is well pleased, the Lord our Righteousness. We must think of Christ that we may reconcile these petitions with one another. "In thy faithfulness answer me and in thy righteousness; and enter not into judgment with thy servant."

This verse shows how vain all expectation must be of working out a righteousness by the deeds of the law, or of contributing anything towards our own justification. If we look to our own works, there is nothing reasonable but despair; looking to Christ and to his work, we have hope. For the least sin that we have committed we can never make atonement, but the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin. Even if there were no depravity inherent in the transgressor—no temptation to more transgression—nothing but one sin committed—the most perfect obedience, however long continued, could not atone for it, and nothing could be superadded which should serve the purpose any better. The demands of the law—unchanging and unrelaxing—would still press at every moment for all which could then be rendered—not a moment's intermission possible, not a moment which could be made available to counterbalance the transgression of a moment that is past. But the confidence of believers is this: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us," and by his obedience and sufferings "hath magnified the law and made it honourable." Think of him as God—think of him as man—think of him as God and man in two distinct natures and one person—think of the covenant of grace, and of the Church's union with Christ, and of his bearing the iniquities of many, his being delivered for their offences and raised again for their justification—and you will see how David, whilst he deprecated God's wrath, humbling himself as a sinner who deserved that wrath, was able to appeal to the faithfulness and righteousness of God.

And mark, my friends, how closely this is connected with the subject of assurance already under our consideration. I have adverted to the difference betwixt the assurance of faith and the assurance of salvation, so often confounded with one another. But observe again, that without assurance of faith there can be no assurance of salvation. That is the

foundation upon which it rests. How indispensable, therefore, are clear views of Christ? Without clear views of what he is and of what he has done, we cannot confidently trust in him. Unless we see how God's faithfulness and righteousness are glorified in the cross, the thought of these attributes must produce terror. And thus, whatever be the usefulness of self-examination, and however necessary it is to attend to marks of grace, there is no peace to the soul, no assurance of God's love, nor feeling of salvation, unless we be actually looking to Christ—looking to him not (if that be possible) in mere uninterested contemplation, nor in mere uninterested admiration, but looking to him for salvation.

I shall dwell no longer on the second verse, and as for the third and fourth, the remarks already made concerning the occasion of this psalm, and the distress of soul to which the believer may be reduced, must suffice. Only in the last clause of the third verse, "He hath made me to dwell in darkness, as those that have been long dead;" and in the seventh verse, which you may compare with it, "Hear me speedily, O Lord, my spirit faileth, hide not thy face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit;" you may see what the believer may become like, but what he can never become. His soul may cleave unto the dust—he may dwell in darkness as those that have been long dead—he may become like unto those that go down into the pit—but down into the pit he cannot go, he "shall never die." I know not how death-like his condition may become, nor how desperate his case may seem, how far it is possible that a believer may be led into sin, nor how far it is possible that Satan may prevail to obscure his views, to quench his hope, to fill his soul with doubt and with dismay; but the word of God assures us of this, "he shall never die." I know not how desolate a believer's heart may become, nor how long he may remain desolate, in deprivation of the sensible fellowship of God; but God "will not cast off for ever"—"though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies."

And if the contemplation of those great distresses from which the Psalmist obtained deliverance be very encouraging to those who are themselves involved in trials somewhat similar, as some of you may be, no less is it calculated to produce humility in those on whom the light of God's countenance now shines, and to make them sensible of their entire dependence on the grace of God. It were easy to enlarge upon this point, and to shew you that the study of such a psalm as this is not less likely to be profitable in a time of joy than in a time when the spirit is, like the Psalmist's, overwhelmed and

the heart desolate. But we must proceed to consider the remaining verses.

The fifth verse describes an exercise in which the Psalmist found comfort—"I remember the days of old; I meditate on all thy works; I muse on the work of thy hands." Some rays from heaven now began to pierce the clouds and to illuminate the darkness. The thought of what God had done encouraged hope again. For many reasons, it is good to meditate on all the works of God; his attributes are exhibited in his works, and there is none of them all, nothing in creation nor in providence, which a pious man may not piously contemplate. The frequent references made in Scripture to these works of God, may serve to show us both how profitable it is to contemplate them piously, and how they may be piously contemplated. To look upon the grandeur or the beauty of creation may move to reverence, or to holy enthusiasm of gratitude and love. Most pleasing discoveries of God's wisdom and goodness may be made in watching the habits of an insect, or examining the structure of a flower. Thus, the soul may be strengthened against atheistical suggestions, and may delight itself in the Lord; and amidst the troubles of life, the bustle of affairs, and the tumults of the people, the glorious spectacle of the starry firmament, in its perfect serenity, may tranquillise the heart. And ought not hope to be reanimated in the Christian by every rainbow that appears in the cloud, and tells of a covenant-keeping God? But, above all, God's works of grace are great, and his people seek them out, and take pleasure in them. David reflected on the ancient covenant and promises, on the calling of Abraham, on the deliverance from Egypt, on the parted waters of the Red Sea, on the manna of the wilderness, on the conquest and secure possession of the promised land. David "encouraged himself in the Lord his God" by reflecting on these things, and on such things as these. Let us follow his example—these are proper themes of meditation for us likewise; and, above all, the work of Christ now finished, his decease which he accomplished at Jerusalem, his resurrection from the dead, and his ascension into heaven. It is good to study the history of the Church, to mark God's faithfulness in the fulfilment of his promises, and to behold the unceasing diffusion of the riches of his grace. It is good also to inquire how individuals have found him faithful in their personal experience, and how his grace has abounded to the chief of sinners. No enlightened Christian can be indifferent about the success of missions, or about revivals of religion, and such works of grace as have lately been wrought in some parts of our own land, and likewise in other lands. Especially, it behoves the Christian to consider well all God's dealings with himself, and all that God

has done for his own soul. If at any time we have sensibly enjoyed the fellowship of God, let us keep it in remembrance, and earnestly recal the thought in times of trouble. Such a thought is not by itself enough—we must not rest on feelings present nor remembered; but such a thought may greatly cheer us when out of the depths we cry unto the Lord—when through darkness we strain the eyes in looking to Christ. It was thus that David encouraged himself—thus that he made use of his recollections of the past; for, see how he says in the verse which follows, “I stretch forth my hands unto thee, my soul thirsteth after thee as a thirsty land.” “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.” “When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them.” “Waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert! The desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose!”

To the seventh verse I have already adverted, and will only further call your attention to the earnestness which it exhibits, and the importunity with which the Psalmist prays. O, if we were as earnest as he, we too would be importunate! If we knew the value and sweetness of God’s fellowship, we would be more sensible of desolateness when his countenance does not shine on us. We would cry, like the Psalmist, not only for his return, but for his speedy return. (Verse eighth.) “Cause me to hear thy loving-kindness in the morning, for in thee do I trust.” “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.” It is morning when the light of the Sun of Righteousness is seen, when God’s countenance shines again. I am not sure whether there is any reference here made to that morning when God wrought wonders at the Red Sea, as he brought his people out of Egypt. But it is obvious that here the Psalmist prays with earnestness for spiritual deliverance, and for the restored sense of God’s favour. Nor did he ask one spiritual blessing alone: “Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk;” he immediately says, “for I lift up my soul unto thee.” The man that trusts in God will certainly lift up his soul unto God to ask this blessing. In a time of trouble he may be moved to earnest importunity by the sense of spiritual danger, as well as by the sense of spiritual misery and want; but it is thus also that the believer runs on his way rejoicing—he is God’s servant, whom the Lord himself has made willing in the day of his power—he is willing to serve God—he desires and delights to do the will of God—he prays, and is heard. The Psalmist expresses desires in which every pious heart partakes, when, after entreating God to speak to him with the voice of lovingkindness, he asks instruction as

to the way in which he should walk, that he may advance to closer communion with God, may walk in the light of the Lord, and may shew forth the praises of Him who has called him out of darkness into his marvellous light. My friends, do you long for this? Do you ask this? Do you implore God to guide you, to uphold you, to keep you from sin? Or would you be better pleased to obtain justification without sanctification, if it were possible? Would you be contented to walk all the way to hell, if, at the last moment, you were to be plucked up thence and placed in heaven? God's people would not.

The Psalmist prays again for deliverance from his enemies. (Verse ninth.) "Deliver me, O Lord, from mine enemies; I flee unto thee to hide me." It may be comment enough on this verse, and our time scarcely permits more, to quote the first verse of the forty-sixth Psalm: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." In God himself is our only refuge, in God is our only safety. Even when distressed by the thought of your sins, flee not from God, but flee to God; even when transgression is recent, flee at once to God, to the throne of grace; God will receive you graciously; Jesus will not cast out any who come unto God through him. And the way to that hiding place of perfect safety is free and open; all enemies, all devils, cannot stop it up; God is a very present help—your hiding place is near.

The prayer for instruction and guidance is repeated in the tenth verse. You see how earnest the Psalmist was in this prayer: "Teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God; thy spirit is good, lead me into the land of uprightness." God alone can teach us the will of God; it is learned only by those who sit at the feet of Jesus, and who contemplate him in order to behold it illustrated in his life. And you see how David depended on the Holy Spirit. That Spirit is promised and sent forth by Christ to guide his disciples into all truth. We have encouragement even beyond David, in making such prayers as this, under the present ministration of the Spirit. "Thy spirit is good, lead me into the land of uprightness." Nor must we think that the Spirit merely teaches, or that consolation is his only other work. He is Almighty, and his power sustains the sons of God. He leads them, helping all their infirmities; leads them so as to bring them through every difficulty, through every trial, to a wealthy place, to a land of uprightness, to a place of enlargement and of joy, nay, often thus time after time emancipating them and making them victorious, and certainly bringing them at last to the better country—the heavenly Canaan.

The reference to the Spirit and his work is not less manifest in the eleventh verse than in the tenth, though he is not mentioned by name.

It is he who quickens. He quickens those who are dead in trespasses and sins, and they become living men, alive unto God. He quickens these living men also, these believers, when their life seems ebbing and decaying fast away, when they seem ready to die or have become like the dead. Thus the Psalmist, a man alive unto God, a man living by faith, prays in the 119th Psalm (v. 25), "My soul cleaveth unto the dust, quicken thou me according to thy word." Thus here, "Quicken me, O Lord, for thy name's sake; for thy righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble." It is a prayer for the health and strength and joy of the spiritual life. And observe the plea—"for thy name's sake"—"for thy righteousness' sake"—unto the glory of all thine attributes, especially unto the glory of thy righteousness. All the glory of our salvation must be ascribed to God. His is the power, and in himself is the end of its exercise; and the more cordially that we ascribe all the glory to him, the more perfectly is salvation enjoyed. And observe again, how, as in the first verse, the righteousness of God is brought prominently into view as an attribute especially glorified in our salvation. O for what a perfect assurance of salvation is the way prepared, when, even in midst of spiritual trouble, a believer is enabled to plead with God on the ground of God's own glory, and God's own righteousness! Trouble cannot be prolonged when it is opposed to God's glory and to God's righteousness.

The last verse of this Psalm would require a whole discourse for its elucidation, and only a few sentences can be given to it at present. You see how David, who takes hold of God by faith as his God, gives himself to God at the same time, saying, "I am thy servant." This is just, in fact, to renew the former appeal to God's righteousness and God's faithfulness, and all that belongs to the glory of God's name. You see also how terrible is the fate of the enemies of God's servants? How can they escape? for, being enemies of God's servants, they must needs be enemies of God. God will recompence tribulation unto them that now trouble his Church, but unto them that are now troubled, rest. Neither men nor devils shall escape his vengeance. His mercy towards his people appears along with his justice when he judgeth in the earth, and when the persecutor and the oppressor are swept away. He ariseth for judgment to save all the meek of the earth. Let the people of the Lord be comforted; let the meek, the humble, the contrite, the prayerful be comforted. Let them look beyond the world, onward and upward to heaven. But ye who believe not, who harden your hearts against Christ's warnings and invitations—ye who hate the Church of Christ although ye may be its professed members—ye who mock at the godli-

ness of saints and vex and harass them in their heavenward journey—ye who cast stumbling-blocks before them, and assiduously put temptations in their way, and cannot be contented unless you can persuade them to take part with you in what you feel well-nigh intolerable, that they both by speech and by example should condemn—I bid you listen to this prayer of the Psalmist, and tremble as you listen, “Of thy mercy cut off mine enemies and destroy all them that afflict my soul, for I am thy servant.” May God give you grace to repent.—  
AMEN.



## LECTURE V.

THE SECURITY AND CHARACTER OF THEM WHO ARE IN CHRIST JESUS.

BY THE REV. R. WILLIAMSON, DUNKELD.

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”—ROMANS viii. 1-4.

THE first verse of this chapter is evidently an inference from something going before. That it is, the word “therefore” in the passage sufficiently indicates. “There is, *therefore*,” says the apostle, “now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” It will be necessary, therefore, in order to see the grounds upon which the affirmation in the first verse rests, to ascertain its connection with the preceding context. In the preceding chapters, the apostle demonstrates the sinfulness and guilt of man—his inability to erect for himself a platform of acceptance, and the sublime doctrine of justification by faith in the merits of Christ alone. In establishing the doctrine of justification by faith, he considers the change made in the sinner’s legal position, when, by receiving and relying upon Christ as the Lord his righteousness, and the Lord his strength, the law ceases to have claims against him as a covenant of works, though still his standard as a rule of life. And the believer being no longer under the law, but under grace, in consequence of being invested with a righteousness manifested without the law, yet, in all respects, conformable to its highest demands, is acquitted and accepted by the Divine Lawgiver. Hence, the apostle concludes, that “there is now”—that is, in these circumstances, the claims of violated law having been satisfied by their surety—“no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus.” But the opening verse of the chapter is not only a legitimate inference from the previous discussion; it is also a distinct proposition, in proof of which the apostle adduces several arguments in the remaining verses of the chapter. The proposition is, “there is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus;” and the proof is, their being delivered from the

law as a covenant of works, its demands having been met and fulfilled by their Surety and covenant Head—the indwelling of the Spirit—the fact of their adoption—their predestination to eternal life, and the provision made for their growth in grace—the mission of Christ on their behalf, and the immutability of God's love towards them, from which nothing shall be able to separate the believing soul. Having thus seen the precise relation in which the passage stands to the preceding and subsequent context, let us now proceed to a more particular examination of the verses which we have read as the subject of a few observations.

“There is, therefore,” says the apostle, “now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” Here, then, we have three distinct topics of consideration—the parties spoken of; them who are in Christ Jesus; their distinguishing characteristics—they walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit; what is predicated regarding them—there is no condemnation to them.

First, then, of the parties alluded to, it is said that they are in Christ Jesus. What, then, is implied in being in Christ Jesus? It is to be savingly united to him as their covenant Head. It is, as the Apostle John states, to have fellowship with him—to be united to him as the branch to the vine—as the superstructure to the foundation—as the members to the body. The origin of this union is to be traced to the sovereign love of God. This is abundantly evident from the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians, where the apostle says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ; according as he hath *chosen us in him* before the foundation of the world.” We affirm, then, that the origin of this glorious relationship in which the believer stands to his exalted Head, is to be sought for in the sovereign love of God. Do you ask me the reason of it? No reason can be assigned by any human being, but that so it seemed meet to the infinite Jehovah. We cannot find the reason of this distinguishing affection—this surpassing love in anything in the sinner, or done by him; for he is vile and guilty, and therefore justly exposed to the righteous displeasure of Jehovah. It was when he lay in his blood, that God compassionated him. It was when he was guilty, that God pardoned him. It was when he was without help, that the everlasting arms of love encircled him. It was when he was diseased, that the life-giving influences of a spiritual renovation were breathed into his torpid soul. Ask the woman, notorious for moral turpitude, who met with our Lord in Simon's house, and was drawn to him by the cords of love—what was the reason of this distinguishing affection? and she will say, the great love wherewith he loved me.

Ask Manasseh, whose hands were red with the blood of God's own people, why he was brought unto union with the Redeemer? and he will point to sovereign love, and tell you that God will have mercy upon whom he will have mercy. Ask Saul of Tarshish, the destroyer of God's heritage, why he was brought into the glorious relationship which subsists between Christ and his soul? and he will reply, the sovereign love of God, that he might show forth the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus. The language of the redeemed on this subject is one—"By the grace of God we are what we are." Brethren, the origin of this union is to be found in the free, sovereign love of God alone—a love purely sovereign in its choice—abasing the proud, and exalting the humble—casting down the mighty from their seats, and elevating the lowly in heart—pouring the stream of life unto the polluted soul of the publican, and passing by the whited sepulchre—"erecting its mercy-seat in the path of the outcast," and filling the soul with holy amazement at the fulness, and freeness, and munificence of its distributions. The origin, then, of this union is to be sought for in the sovereign love of God. What, it may now be asked, is the efficient cause? How is it brought about and consummated? To these questions we reply, that the efficient cause of this glorious union is God the Holy Ghost, and that it is effected both *passively* and *actively*. And this view of the matter will enable us to see both the part which the Divine Spirit takes in the formation of this glorious union, and the part proper to the soul that is the subject of it. It is effected passively—that is, when in a day of power, the Divine Spirit convinces the soul of sin and of righteousness—gives it a perception of its own danger and of Christ's ableness and willingness to save, and thus unites Christ to the soul; and it is effected actively—that is, when the sinner, thus convinced, and enlightened, and quickened, in the exercise of faith wrought by the Spirit, receives and accepts of the Redeemer now brought nigh, and exclaims, "Lord, I believe!" "My Lord and my God!" and thus the union is consummated by the mutual consent of both parties—1st, by the Spirit on the part of Christ; and, 2dly, in the exercise of a personally appropriating faith on the part of the sinner, so that Christ abides not only in the soul, but the believing soul also abides in him. There is a *mutual* union—Christ united to the soul by the Spirit, and the soul united to Christ by faith. Now, the union by faith on the part of the sinner is the effect and result of the previous union by the Spirit on the part of Christ—that is, the *advances* in the formation of this union are made by the Spirit on the part of Christ. He first comes to the soul—brings Christ nigh to it—convinces it of sin—enlightens it in the knowledge of Christ, the glorious object now presented to it—works faith in

it, and the quickened soul, in the exercise of this faith, apprehends and appropriates the Redeemer, exclaiming, "This God is my God; He is all my salvation and all my desire." He is mine, and I am his; so that the formation of the union is no less gracious than its origin is sovereign. From these brief remarks, you will perceive how it is, that faith is the act of a *living* not of a *dead* soul—of a soul quickened by the energy of the Divine Spirit; and that, so far from there being any thing meritorious in the faith which apprehends Christ, it is in itself the product of the Spirit's operation in the soul.

The union of the soul to Christ by its exercise, is the result of a previous union on the part of Christ by the Spirit; and the union being thus completed by the mutual consent and will of both parties—Christ being united to the soul and the soul to Christ—the believer can truly exclaim, "not only my beloved is mine, but also I am his." And hence it is, that, in reference to this mutual union, Christ is said to be in believers, and believers to be in Christ—he to dwell in them, and they in him. And hence our Lord himself, in addressing his disciples, says, "Abide in me and I in you." And this view of the matter is in perfect accordance with the declaration of the Apostle John, when he says, "We love him because that he *first* loved us, for our love is the effect of his being first shed abroad in the soul; and his love is the originating cause and exciting motive of ours to him; so that in every possible view of the matter, and at every step in the process, the believer may justly declare, "By the grace of God I am what I am."

Doubtless, this view of the matter is highly offensive to those who prefer their virtues and amiabilities to the graces of the Spirit, and talk with complacency of the power and purity of a fallen nature. But it is no part of the design of God's revelation to pronounce panegyrics upon a heart which is the foul cage of every unclean bird—to induce a man to believe that he is something when he is nothing—that he is pure when he is vile—that he is rich and increased in goods, when he is poor, and miserable, and wretched, and polluted—to enable any puny worm of the dust, shivering in the rags of a polluted righteousness, to exclaim, "mine own hand hath got me the victory." It may, indeed, be objected, and it has been objected by those who confide in the dignity and capabilities of a sinful nature, that this places man in a truly humiliating position. We admit it. It is one great design of the gospel scheme of recovery that it should. It is to abase the carnality of unrenewed nature—to transform the wisdom of the world unto foolishness, and its might unto weakness—to bring down the pride of the unregenerate heart from the heights of its self-sufficiency, and cause it to exclaim with the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner." It is to wither

every gourd of creature confidence and creature strength, and render it eternally and infallibly true, that it is not by might nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts, that this great and marvellous work is begun, and sustained, carried on, and consummated.

Having now seen the manner in which the union is effected, let us proceed to consider the character of those who are savingly united to Jesus. "They walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit." "If any man," says the apostle, "be in Christ, he is a new creature." A complete and radical change has taken place upon them. They have passed from death unto life. New principles of action have been infused into their souls. The relish for sin has lost its power, and a relish for holiness has been implanted in its stead. They walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit. The expression walking, as here employed, refers not to an isolated act, but to habitual conduct; and, therefore, the meaning of the passage is, that those who are in Christ Jesus, regulate their lives and conversations, not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. What, then, are we to understand by the term *flesh* as here employed? And here we would remark, that by the term *flesh*, we are to understand unrenewed, and unsanctified nature, as opposed to regenerated and sanctified nature. By the expression *Spirit*, we are to understand the renewed heart, the sanctified soul, or, more properly speaking, the Spirit of God—God the Holy Ghost dwelling in the renewed heart as in a temple. "Know ye not," says the apostle, "that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you." The meaning, therefore, of the passage is, that those who are in Christ Jesus do not regulate their walk and conversation according to the lusts and impulses of a corrupt nature, but according to the guidance and direction of the Spirit, that divine agent, whose office in the economy of the gospel it is, to apply the benefits of the redemption purchased by Christ, and carry on and consummate the work of sanctification in the soul. These, then, are the characteristics of the ransomed of the Lord, that they walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit. Whence we affirm that regeneration and union to Christ are invariably connected—that there is both a change in *nature*, and a change in *state*—that when a man is regenerated and justified, there is also infallible provision made for his advancement in the divine life—that when he is united to Christ, he walks not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

Now, you are not for a moment to suppose that the apostle affirms here that the believing soul never yields to the suggestions of the flesh. Such an affirmation would run counter to all experience. So far from that, he informs us in the preceding chapter, "that there was a law in his members warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into

captivity to the law of sin which was in his members." The apostle, therefore, does not affirm that the believing soul never yields to the suggestions of the flesh, but he does affirm that the believing soul does not walk, does not habitually walk after the flesh; and that walking after the Spirit is the general characteristic of his life, and the great end at which he constantly aims. Although, therefore, sin may still harass him, and cause him to halt in the paths of the new obedience, it has not the ascendancy in the soul—it has no longer dominion over him, and thus though he falls he shall rise again. How then, brethren, do you stand in reference to this matter? Are you walking after the flesh or after the Spirit? Is your treasure on earth or in heaven? Are your affections set on things above, or concentrated on the refuse of a perishing world? Are you crucifying the flesh, or fulfilling its lusts? Are you walking after the flesh? If so, you are not in Christ Jesus; for if any man be in Christ, he is a *new creature*. God never united a soul to the Redeemer, and then left it to wallow unrestrainedly amid the impurities of sin and the lusts of a polluted nature. God never conferred a robe of justifying righteousness, without making provision for one of sanctifying purity. God never gives a new name, without a new heart and a new nature. We say then, that if you walk after the flesh, you are not in Christ Jesus; for if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. He is yet an outcast—an alien—a slave of sin—a bondsman of Satan. If you possess not the characteristics of the Christian, you are not united to the Christian's Head; and if not united to him, you are under condemnation. We do not say that you *will* be under it, but that you are even now under it. A sentence of wrath has gone forth against you, and the Lord is not slack concerning his threatenings. A thousand years are but as one day to him, who is from everlasting; and delay in executing his purposes does not affect their infallible certainty. Walking after the flesh, you are out of Christ, and out of Christ you are necessarily under condemnation. It is, indeed, true that you may be altogether ignorant of your guilty and perilous condition, but that is one of the most melancholy features of your case. Yours is one of the most appalling and truly hopeless positions which an immortal or responsible being can occupy on this side the world of spirits. Better far be a homeless outcast upon earth, than wrapt in the insensibility of carnal security. Better far have the soul torn and distracted by the throes and tumults of a pungent conviction, than immersed in the stagnation of spiritual death. Guilt and spiritual blindness go together. "Dim eyes and delusive perceptions" are characteristics of the unregenerate, as well as hard hearts and polluted souls. You feel not that you are under condemnation! Was it ever otherwise?

Look to the vale of Siddim. Were the impious revellers, and the God-forgetting children of Belial, who lived there, conscious of the perilous nature of their condition? They laughed Lot to scorn. They treated his warnings as the dreams of lunacy. They walked after the flesh, and were therefore under condemnation. But did their carnal security ensure their safety? Did their insensibility to danger prove a preventive against it? Let their destruction by fire and brimstone from heaven answer the question. The rich man in the parable did not feel that he was under condemnation; but his insensibility was annihilated for ever, when in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments. Nothing can be more foolish than to imagine, that because you are insensible of your danger, all is well. It is the object of the god of this world to blind the soul—to cause it to walk securely on the borders of Tophet—to keep the scales on the eyes till they fall off mid the fire that is never quenched—to steal the heart till the first pang felt is inflicted by the gnawings of the worm that never dies. It is the master piece of his policy—the perfection of his stratagems—to send souls down to hell with a lie in their right hand. If you are walking after the flesh, you are under condemnation, and your insensibility cannot affect in any way whatever the solemn declarations of God's word.

But whilst those who are *out* of Christ walk after the flesh, those who are *in* Christ walk after the *Spirit*. Brethren, is this your character? Do you walk after the Spirit? Is the same mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus? Have you put off the old man with his affections and lusts which are corrupt, and put on the new man, which after Christ Jesus is renewed in knowledge and righteousness and true holiness? Do you press forward in the Christian race, panting after the beauty of holiness, and a greater conformity to your exalted Head? If so, there is then no condemnation to you, for ye are Christ's. Christ's, by the free sovereign gift of God in the Covenant of Grace; for he hath chosen you in him to the glory of his grace, that you might be conformed to his image—Christ's, by the ransom which he laid down for your redemption in implementing the terms of the Covenant—Christ's, for you are even now the temples of the Holy Ghost, who is engaged in rendering you meet for the heavenly inheritance; and Christ's by a soul-quieting recumbancy in the arms of his love, for in the exercise of a living faith, you have cast yourselves upon him soul, body, and spirit, for time and for eternity, for wisdom, for righteousness, for sanctification and complete redemption. Thus in Christ, to you there is no condemnation.

But how, it may be asked, does union to Christ, or, in the language of the apostle, being "in Christ Jesus," deliver from condemnation? The second and third verses assign the reason. For, says the apostle, "the

law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit." What then are we to understand by the phrases in the second verse—"the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, and the law of sin and death?" It is evident that the two expressions are here contrasted, and therefore "the meaning of the one necessarily determines the meaning of the other." By the law of the spirit of life, we are to understand the power of spiritual principles in the regenerated soul, of which the Holy Spirit is the author and sustainer; and by the law of sin and death, we are to understand the law of God, which, although perfectly holy, and just, and good, yet in consequence of the transgression of the creature, thunders forth his condemnation, gives "the knowledge of sin," and is thus "incidentally the cause of sin and death." So that, in the light of the reason assigned in the second verse, the meaning of the first is simply this. There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, because, in consequence of his interposition, they have been freed from the law as a covenant of works—that law which, although holy, and just, and good, is the discoverer of sin; because, where there is no law there is no transgression, and where there is no transgression, death can have no existence as a *moral penalty*. Now, you will observe, that although the law is here spoken of as the law of sin and death, the apostle carefully guards against being supposed as affirming that there was any defect in the law. So far from that, he proceeds to show that the defect is not in the *law*, but in the *sinner*—not in the *standard* of obedience, but in the *subject* of obedience—not in the *rule*, but in the *creature* who was to walk according to the rule. The law is now weak, that is, it is inadequate to the recovery of the sinner; but then that is in consequence of no change in it, but in the creature. It is weak, but only through the flesh. The impotency of the law to justify is not through imperfection. On the other hand, it is in consequence of its perfection that it is weak through the flesh and cannot justify the sinner. For what was the position which the creature originally occupied towards the law? He was related to it as a covenant of works. His obedience was to be commensurate with its highest requirements, otherwise the conditions of the covenant could not be implemented. Now, so long as man continued to render perfect and unexceptionable obedience, the law was powerful to justify. Justification was quite competent to it, and the obedience of the creature was the ground of his acceptance. But when he ceased to



render that obedience—when his faculties were struck with a moral paralysis, and his soul prostrated in the dust of spiritual death, justification by obedience to the law was altogether impossible. His obedience then ceased to be commensurate with its requirements, and not being commensurate, the law could no longer furnish a ground of acceptance in the sight of the lawgiver. Justification was no longer competent to the law. But then how did this arise? Not through any change in the law, but simply and solely through a change in the creature who was to yield obedience to its demands. He fell from the high position in which his Creator had originally placed him. His energies were withered, and his efforts fell infinitely short of the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of the law's requirements. How then could he be accepted? By bringing down the law to his wretched obedience, and thus by a compromise of its claims, bring them into correspondency? That cannot be—God's law is perfect. It is immutable as the lawgiver. It fulminates its threatenings against all and every who obey not *in all things*, and will remain satisfied with nothing short of the eternal destruction of the sinner, or a full and perfect satisfaction tendered in his stead. Heaven and earth may pass away, but one jot or tittle of the law shall not be violated with impunity. Its claims remain altogether unaffected. The change is entirely on the part of the creature. He has fallen from his original position, but the law has not fallen in its demands. He has changed, but it remains the same. It claimed perfect obedience. It claims it still. It is now weak in reference to the sinner's justification, but that is its glory and excellence. For how is it weak? Just because of its perfection. Just because it will not come down to the wretched efforts of the sinner—because it will not compromise matters with the transgressor—because it will “tolerate no platform of acceptance which has not an adequate satisfaction for its basis.” In one word, it is weak, just because man is a sinner—it is weak through the flesh. And here, we may remark in passing, that this view of the matter demonstrates the absurdity and the dangerous nature of the opinion, that the moral impotency of the sinner affects his responsibility in the sight of God; as if the loss, by wilful and deliberate transgression on the part of the creature, of his power to obey, should necessarily imply a corresponding loss of right on the part of the Creator to demand obedience. The change is altogether on the part of the sinner. The standard of obedience remains the same. The law has not changed—the Lawgiver has not changed; and if the creature is now the victim of a moral impotency, it is of a moral impotency *self-induced*; and therefore, so far from proving destructive of the claims of the law to his obedience, only serves to aggravate his criminality. The capa-

bilities of the creature, when he came originally from the hand of the Creator, were perfectly adequate to the fulfilment of the conditions of the covenant; and if these capabilities have been impaired, it is by the wilful transgression of the creature alone; and, therefore, not only is his responsibility to the Lawgiver altogether unaffected, but he is also responsible for the loss of his original righteousness—for the enlisting of his powers in the service of Satan, and thus rivetting with his own hands the fetters of his bondage. Perfect obedience he is now utterly unable to render, and therefore the law is utterly unable to justify him. It is thus weak, but only through the flesh. The question, then, comes to be, How can he be accepted? The law cannot do it. How then can he be reinstated into favour with the Lawgiver? The third and fourth verses contain the answer. “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.”

The sinner could not tender satisfaction to the law, but the brightness of the Father's glory was manifested in the flesh for that purpose. He is the Father's gift. He appeared in the likeness of sinful flesh, and is therefore Emmanuel, God with us. He took upon him not the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham. He was sent in the likeness of sinful flesh. Observe how guarded the apostle's language is. He does not say that he assumed sinful flesh, but that he came in the *likeness* of sinful flesh. The smallest conceivable blemish would have absolutely disqualified him for assuming the office, or performing the functions of Mediator; “for such an High Priest became us, who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.” He manifested himself, however, not in a sinful nature, but in a nature *similar to that which had sinned*; and as sin originally formed no part of human nature, but was afterwards contracted by an overt act of transgression, the Mediator could be pure and unspotted, and yet possess all the essential properties of humanity. He was sent in the likeness of sinful flesh, that being bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, he might be a merciful and faithful high priest, able to compassionate his people, and feel for man as for a brother. In the passage now under consideration, there is a distinct reference to the two natures of the Redeemer—that is, he is here brought before us in his entire character as Mediator—as truly and essentially God, as really and truly man. He is called by way of eminence, God's own Son, inasmuch as he is a partaker of his nature, and “co-existent with him in the unity of the Divine Essence;” and he is said to have been sent in the likeness of sinful flesh, because he took

not on him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham. "Forasmuch, then, as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same, that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil." In virtue of the union of the Divine and human natures in his mysterious person, he is a Day-man, able to stand betwixt the living and the dead—lay his hand upon both parties, and thus make peace. He is God's Son and our brother—possessed of infinite inherent dignity to entitle him to treat with the Lawgiver, and of infinite compassion to feel for the sinner. "He is acceptable to God, he is suitable to man." Great is the mystery of godliness, God manifested in the flesh.

But not only did he come in the likeness of sinful flesh; the special purpose for which he appeared is also stated. He came, says the apostle, for sin—that is, for a sin-offering. The phrase, *for sin*, is often used in this sense in Scripture. Thus, it is said of the Mediator, that "God made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin." Not that he was personally made or constituted a sinner, for he was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners; but he was put forward as the sinner's substitute and surety—as a sacrificial victim, as an offering for sin. He made him to be an offering or sacrifice for sin, who knew no sin; for when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. The special object, then, of his appearing in the likeness of sinful flesh was, that, as a sacrifice or offering for sin, he might redeem them that were under the law. As Mediator, he condemned sin in the flesh, removed its guilt in order to his people's justification; and by satisfying the claims of infinite justice, freed them from the law as a Covenant of Works; so that the believer's delivery from condemnation is a result of the mediation of Christ.

The great design of the atoning sacrifice offered up by Emmanuel, was to display the glory of God, in the redemption of the guilty—to cause mercy and truth to meet together in reference to the sinner's recovery. And hence the apostle, in unfolding that design, declares it to be, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. The righteousness of Christ is here called the righteousness of the law, because it is a righteousness conformable to the law—a righteousness which meets its highest requirements, and magnifies and renders it honourable. This righteousness is the only ground of a sinner's justification; for being clothed upon with it, he is freed from the condemning power of the law of sin and death. It consists of the active and passive

obedience of the Mediator. It is a righteousness in which the eye of the Omniscient God can see nothing amiss—a righteousness wrought out and brought in for the express purpose of justifying the ungodly—a righteousness offered unto you this day without money and without price; for it is unto all, and upon all them that believe, for there is no difference.

“That the righteousness of the law,” says the apostle, “might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” Here the apostle carefully guards against two errors of an opposite, but equally fatal nature—the errors of Legalism and Antinomianism. The legalist would amalgamate his own wretched efforts with the obedience of Christ; and thus introduce self-merit unto his ground of acceptance. The apostle lays the axe at the root of that heresy; for he shews that the righteousness of Christ, to the exclusion of all merit in the part of the sinner, is the only ground of justification before God—that the law is weak through the flesh, and that by its deeds, no flesh living can be justified. The antinomian would look upon himself as relieved by the sufferings of the Mediator from the law, not only as a covenant of works, but also as a rule of life; and therefore, sins wilfully and deliberately because grace abounds. The apostle lays the axe at the root of that heresy; for he declares that those who are in Christ Jesus, walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. He annihilates the hope of the legalist; for he tells him, that by the deeds of the law shall no flesh living be justified. He annihilates the hope of the antinomian; for he tells him, that the law, though not a covenant of works to the believer, is still a rule of life—that a man must be sanctified as well as justified—that without holiness, no man can see the Lord; and that, if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

Brethren, have you received and accepted of this glorious righteousness? Are you relying and building upon him who wrought it out? Are you in Christ Jesus? If so, you will walk, not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. If ye have received the Lord Jesus, walk in him, breathe his Spirit, adorn his doctrine. Let your light so shine before men, that they may take knowledge of you, as having been with Jesus. Of those who have not fled for refuge to the hope set before them in the Gospel, we would ask,—Who will make intercession for you, when God riseth up in fearful majesty to take vengeance upon all that know him not? Where will you find a sanctuary out of Christ. When the avenger of blood is following rapidly behind you, where is the daysman who can lay his hand upon you both, and satisfy him, and save you? Can your hands be strong, or your heart endure in the day that God shall deal with you. Turn then to the strong hold, while prisoners of hope. There is mercy with God, that he may be feared. Harden

then not your hearts. Despise not his gracious invitations. Trample not under foot his overtures of reconciliation; lest you be left in bitterness of spirit to exclaim,—“The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and I am not saved.”

To those who are rejoicing in Emmanuel, as the Lord their righteousness, and the Lord their strength, we would say,—“Walk worthy of your high vocation. Be not high minded, but fear. Remember the rock, whence ye were hewn, and who it was that established your goings. And as you traverse the wilderness leaning upon your Beloved, be this your song in the land of your pilgrimage, ‘I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful unto my God; for he hath clothed me with garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, he remembered me in my low estate, for his mercy endureth for ever.’”

In Christ Jesus, to you there is no condemnation; for he shall rest in his love. Having loved you from the beginning, he shall love you to the end. With what a dignity does this union invest the Christian! What an ennobling relationship! What are the pomp and pageantry of a passing world, to the transcendent dignity of being an heir of God—united to the Ancient of days—the Prince of the kings of the earth, whose goings forth have been of old from the days of eternity, possessing in himself all the plenitude of divine perfection! Who is he that will harm you, leaning upon your Beloved? He will shelter you beneath the shadow of his wings. He will hide you in his own pavilion; and who shall ever enter in there, to pluck you forth? Well might the apostle, in contemplating the indissoluble nature of this glorious union, challenge death and life, angels, principalities, and powers, to sever the members from their exalted Head. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?—shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

## LECTURE VI.

CHRIST THE ONLY SUFFICIENT SACRIFICE.

BY THE REV. GEORGE INNES, CANNOBIE.

“ Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire, mine ears hast thou opened: burnt-offering and sin-offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me.”—Ps. xl. 6, 7.

AMONG the many irrefragable proofs that we belong to a fallen race, is the misconstruction which men have put upon the clearest revelations of the Divine will. The eye that is in us is darkness, and no leading doctrine of Scripture can be mentioned, which the depraved intellect of man has not distorted into a thousand monstrous shapes of error.

The Lord had appointed that, in their approaches to him, the Israelites should offer sacrifices as an acknowledgment that their sins could not be remitted without the shedding of blood, and as a declaration of their faith in the Lamb of God, which should take away the sins of the world. The sacrifices both made clear expression of the fearful guilt of sin, and foreshadowed the atonement Christ should make for the transgressions of his people. But the Jews, as a nation, were not impressed with horror of sin, neither were their thoughts led forward to the promised Redeemer. In their shameful misconceptions of the Divine character, they often impiously imagined that, if any of them committed a trespass, he had no more to do than to kill a bullock or a sheep, in sacrifice, and his guilt would be forgiven him. Just as among us, a deluding spirit is always creeping in to whisper false comfort in sin, by the assurance that we have only to ask and it will be forgiven, so did the spirit working in the disobedient children of Israel make use of the sacrifices to lead them on in sin, because grace abounded. Therefore did the Spirit of the Lord strive with them, saying,—“ Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken, than the fat of rams.” As their history advances, the contendings with them on this point become innumerable. Often did God admonish them, that the sacrifice of the wicked was an abomination to him. “ To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to me, saith the Lord. I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks or of he-goats. Bring no more vain oblations; they are a trouble to me; I am weary to bear them. Wash you; make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before

mine eyes ; cease to do evil ; learn to do well." While this intolerable perversion of the Divine Institution, which represented it as giving license to sin on certain easy conditions, was thus strongly reprehended, the other co-existing and intimately connected error, which looked on the typical sacrifices as possessed of a virtue in themselves to blot out transgressions, was also exposed and condemned. It is only by looking to the sacrifice of Christ, that the fearful nature of sin can be fully understood. So long as the Jews fancied that it could be expiated by so trifling a remedy as the blood of bulls and of goats, they could not but think lightly of guilt. Therefore does Scripture endeavour to correct their pernicious mistake ; and in the words of our text, Jesus speaking by the mouth of the Psalmist, saith unto God,—“ Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire ; mine ears hast thou opened : burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come : in the volume of the book it is written of me.”

The psalm from which these words are taken, is a devout expression of gratitude on the part of our Redeemer, as head of his elect people, for the deliverance vouchsafed to him when he was brought back again from the dead, and thus being delivered from the horrible pit of corruption, and the miry clay of man's iniquities, had his goings in the course of his mission established, that he should bring many sons into glory. For this “ is a new song put into his mouth ; even praise unto our God.” As chief among his ten thousand brethren, casting his eye over the many wonderful works and thoughts of God, which have been to usward, and finding them more than can be numbered, he yet sees one thought—one work conspicuously pre-eminent above them all, as worthy to be praised—even the love wherewith God so loved the world, as to give him, the only begotten Son, to the death for sinners ; and he abruptly breaks out in praise of this :—“ Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire ; mine ears hast thou opened : burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come : in the volume of the book it is written of me.” The allusion in the words, “ mine ears hast thou opened,” is to the practice among the Israelites of making an opening in the ears of a servant, who submitted to his master, pledging himself never to quit his service until released by death. When Christ undertook the work of our redemption, he took on him the form of a servant. “ Though being in the form of God, and counting it not robbery to be equal with God, he made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men ; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” (Phil. ii. 6-8.) In this assumption of the form of a servant, “ a body was prepared him ;” and so may the different translation of our text

adopted by the writer to the Hebrews, (Eph. x. 5) be explained. Both expressions refer to the same thing, and the one simply makes clear the meaning of the other. Both direct our attention to the assumption of human nature, by him of whom God saith, "Behold my servant whom I uphold; mine elect in whom my soul delighteth;" and who himself, in speaking to the Father of his work, saith,—“Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me.”

In these words we find two things stated: first, that the Jewish sacrifices were not sufficient to atone for sin; and second, that therefore, Christ came, conscious of being a sufficient sacrifice. In the volume of the book of God's eternal decrees, it was written that the Lamb should be slain, and that his blood should cleanse those to whom it is applied from all sin. In the words here spoken, according to the inspired writer to the Hebrews,—“He taketh away the first” kind of sacrifice, “that he may establish the second.” Let us then, who have been given to see this dispensation of God reverently enquire—I. What kind of atonement for sin was needed.—II. How all the qualities requisite for a sufficient atonement have met in Christ.

I. *What kind of atonement is required.*—The ransom to be given must be costly, though men seem to set lightly by it, for the guilt to be remitted is unutterably great. Man, a creature made by God, and crowned by him with loving kindness and tender mercy, had set himself in opposition to his Creator. Let each of us reflect how we have given our hearts to be filled with ungodly and polluting imaginations, incapacitating ourselves for the worship or service of the holy Lord of heaven and earth, razing out his image from our natures, banishing remembrance of him from our customary thoughts, removing ourselves as far off from him as we could, and selling ourselves as slaves to his and our most bitter enemy. And when, at times, conscience has spoken and rebuked us for our wickedness, reminding us of the justice and power of him against whom we have been offending, have not our hearts hardened themselves and been enmity against God? Have we not resolved that, let him punish us as he may, we would not love him; but even in the depth of misery, would find a secret pleasure in hating him who had wrought us this woe? Strip our miserable hearts of their subterfuges of lies, and they, the old man within us, will be found hating God, raising themselves up in daring rebellion against his holiness and justice, treating his love and his goodness with neglect, and well-nigh with contempt, abusing his long suffering, to encourage themselves in worldly mindedness and abominable licentiousness. For these things our lives are forfeited,



and we are justly subject to the wrath of him who can destroy us soul and body in hell. It is graciously proposed that our guilt be remitted on the offering of an atonement. But of the nature of the atonement to be offered it is manifest,

1st, That it must be equivalent in value to the souls of the redeemed. In the acceptance of an atonement, it is indispensable that the majesty of the Divine holiness and justice be vindicated as completely as if judgment had been executed on man himself, and, therefore, any propitiation of unequal value to the immortal souls of men, is inadmissible. This evidently excludes all atonements of man's devising. All attempts to expiate sin by liberal oblations of burnt-offering, including thousands of rams, or ten thousands of rivers of oil—by severe macerations of the flesh, or toilsome pilgrimages—by enlarged donations of charity, or by a carefully observed routine of lengthened devotions—must be vain. Redoubled zeal in the performance of rites—a giving of goods to feed the flames of the altar with multiplied sacrifices, or sweet cane from a far country—a turning after spending time in fulfilling the desires of the flesh, to serve the living God—can never take away sin. For, when all is done, the question still comes, breaking up peace of conscience, "What hast thou given that thou hast not received, and hast thou not received more? Hast thou not a soul given thee by God? All that thou hast is forfeited, and if thou art to appease God by thine own doings or givings—all that thou hast must be given—thy soul must be yielded to undergo the wrath it has provoked, even to the uttermost."

Such is the stern doom of justice. Except man can find something which he has not received, and that something, too, equivalent in value to the soul, to give as his ransom, then he can never save himself from going down to the pit; for it would be evidently beneath the Majesty of heaven to accept any other than a proportionable atonement. The justice of God had been insulted, his holiness had been treated with contumely; he had said, "The soul which sinneth it shall die;" and can it be proposed that he shall receive as an atonement, anything, the acceptance of which would leave a stain on his holiness and his justice, not fully vindicated? These attributes of the Divine character must be maintained unblemished and unchallengeable at whatever cost. If a ransom is to be accepted for the souls of men, it must be such as will leave the Divine government at least as august and great as if man himself had been given over to wrath.

2d, There must be a connection between those for whom the atonement is offered and the party who suffers—there is a felt propriety in this requirement—the necessity of this ingredient being present in any effectual atonement, combined with their imparity of value, in rendering the sacrifice of animals obviously inadequate to take away sin.

What connection, it may be asked, is there between the sin of a man and the death of bulls and of goats? The same reason would have made it plainly improper to visit for our iniquities any portion of the angelic hosts who never fell. Even if they had been willing to stand as our sureties, yet the absence of any connection, and the want of power on their part to ensure that their suffering would have its meet effect in bringing us back to God, would have rendered it manifestly unsatisfactory. In human affairs, where even very defective arrangements are admitted—when a father becomes surety for his son, or one partner liable for the dealings of another—it is expected that he who is bound in the penalty will exercise some influence or control over the proceedings of him for whom he stands security. There may have been little connection between the parties before, but that a bond of union should now be established between them is anticipated and felt to be proper. And much more in matters appertaining to the Divine procedure, which must be perfect, is it fitting that there should be a marked and recognisable connection between him who was to make propitiation for sin, and those who were to reap the benefit of that propitiation. If he were of a different race of being, not participating in the feelings and actions belonging to humanity, it might be said, “What has he to do with man? He stands on a different footing, and is altogether unconcerned in man’s fate; there is no connection or relationship betwixt them, and wherefore should the merit of his sufferings and his righteousness extend to man?”

3d, He who was to die for man must be innocent. In the typical sacrifices, to offer any victim halt or maimed was an abomination to the Lord. Such victims were rejected with most unbending scrupulousness. By this it was declared that, if there was to be an atonement offered for guilty man, it must be a victim without any blemish of sin, pure and unstained—wholly innocent of transgression. As the two former requisites exclude all hopes of a man’s saving his own soul by any exertions of his own, or of help coming from any other race of creatures, so does this preclude the possibility of any man redeeming his brother, or giving to God a ransom for him. If one soul is to be given in exchange for another, the soul to be accepted must be innocent. If it be guilty, and has sins of its own to answer for, then must it die for its own iniquity. When the royal parent, grieved for the loss of his favourite son, and, horror-struck that he should have been cut off guilty and unannealed, exclaimed, “Oh Absalom! my son, my son! would to God I had died for thee, Absalom, my son!”—he felt that he could not redeem his child from destruction, or give to God a ransom for him. He had sinned himself, and though, in the ecstasy of frantic grief, he exclaimed thus wildly, yet, at the same time, he could not but be conscious that his soul was no offering to be made for sin. All he had was forfeited for his

own transgressions, and he had nothing to give for another. When Paul, to express the fervour of his heart's prayer that Israel should be saved, says that he could wish himself "accursed from God for his brethren's sake," he plainly recognises the salvation of a soul as a work too great for man to accomplish. His words obviously declare the offering of an atonement on the altar for another as a thing impossible with man. The victim to be offered must be an innocent soul, in which the Searcher of Hearts can see no blemish, and where was such an one to be found? From the rising of the sun to the going down of the same, where is the heart which never harboured a sinful thought?—the son who never bent an unkind look on his parent?—the daughter whose lip was never stained by falsehood?—the man who has never lived as if there was no God ruling the world? For four thousand years the Lord looked down from heaven—his eyes beheld the children of men. There was none righteous; there was none fit to redeem his brother from destruction, much less to be a propitiation for the sins of the world.

4th, The victim to be offered must be willing. To punish an unwilling, resisting victim for the sins of the guilty, would be cruel tyranny. Say, then, that an innocent man had been found fit substitute for a guilty brother, would he willingly quit the position he occupied, with all its advantages of freedom from sin—its lines cast in pleasant places, and enjoyment of the light of God's countenance—to be dealt with as guilty—to have all Divine influences excluded from his soul, and no ray of heavenly light cheering the eye—to be plunged in the blackness of darkness, to lie there under the heavy weight of God's anger? Or, say that a pure and happy spirit had disclosed to it the terrors of the Divine wrath in all their fearful power, rending and crushing the soul, and were he asked, "Are you ready to meet the doom deserved by that guilty man, and to die for him, having the curse coming about and enveloping you, reaching to your inmost soul? Are you ready to undergo his sentence?" Would he, think you, consent? Yet such consent was given by the most blessed Son of God, and that not to bear the sins of one, but of many.

II. Beholding that without him there was no salvation for our wretched and desperately wicked souls, he, taking on him, by most amazing condescension, our nature, in full consciousness of possessing all qualities requisite to make an atonement, announces his determination to come forth for that purpose, saying, "Mine ear hast thou opened; Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me." It is for us who profess to trust solely in his blood for pardon of our great guilt, to consider, not once and in a passing manner, but by constant and daily meditation, the excellency of his sacrifice. Thus only can our faith in

it be strengthened and kept in lively and vigorous operation, and thus, too, will our love and reverence of God be heightened, as we admire the wonderful manner in which value, connection, innocence, willingness, all meet in Christ set forth as our propitiation. We cannot speak worthily of the theme, but let each of us consider it day by day more attentively in the Scriptures which testify of Jesus, for thus only can we be rooted and grounded in love. Meanwhile,

1st, We beseech you to note the sufficiency of his sacrifice in value. If it be required that the atonement on the altar be equal in value to the souls to be redeemed, shall it be said that the blood of God's only begotten Son, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself a sacrifice, the just for the unjust, is not sufficient expiation for the sins of all his people? Surely one pang or agony of him who, being in the form of God, counted it not robbery to be equal with God, is proof of the divine indignation against sin, passing what would been given had we all perished! Assuredly the holiness and the justice of God never were so terribly illustrious as in its being seen that his own Son could obtain the redemption of his people only by bearing the iniquities of them all, and shedding his blood to atone for their guilt. What more awful manifestation of holiness can be conceived than the Lord God Almighty hiding his countenance from his own only begotten, because he hath taken on him the sins of his people, and unchangeably resolving that till justice should be satisfied to the uttermost of her demands, he would not turn away his wrath; and though it might involve the giving his well beloved to the death, and the awaking his sword and bathing it in heaven to make it come down to the head of that victim full of grace and truth, God manifest in the flesh, he would not let the cup pass till it was drunk! Amid the rending rocks and opening graves was the truth proclaimed with eternal strength, "Without shedding of blood there is no remission; therefore, because justice must be satisfied, hath the Son of God purchased his church with his own blood."

2d, He had connection with those for whom he died. Though it was his divine nature which gave its unspeakable value to his blood, yet was he made in all points like as we are. Ere he said, "Lo I come," he declares, "Mine ears hast thou opened—a body hast thou prepared me." He "by whom, and to whom, and through whom are all things," took on him the seed of Abraham, and became man as well as God. "Great is the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh." And not merely had he a human body, but also a human soul, capable of all the sinless feelings of our nature. He was linked in the tie of human friendship. There was a disciple "whom Jesus loved." He was touched with a feeling of our infirmities. At the tomb of Lazarus, "Jesus wept." And, more wondrous still, he in whom were "hid all

the treasures of wisdom," had a soul united to him which "grew in wisdom." Therefore was he fit to stand as head and representative of our race before God, to make atonement for us. When the first Adam stood in innocence, he was our head. When he fell, we all derived from him a corrupt nature. "In him we all died." Now, here stands a second Adam, deriving his nature immediately from God, and free from every taint of sin, who offereth himself to bear the iniquities of many, and to be dealt with as guilty and obnoxious to wrath, that, having life in himself, he should give life to as many as believe on his name. Much as we may marvel at the disinterested love which prompted this offer, we cannot but say that its acceptance was perfectly reasonable and just. It was accepted, and as in Adam all died, so in Christ are all believers made alive. His life is infused into their souls, renewing them in the spirit of their minds, and creating them anew unto good works. Their connection with Christ is, to believers, as much a matter of experience and actual operation as the connection between the natural man and the first Adam. As the life derived from Adam worketh to disobedience, so doth the life derived from Christ work to obedience and the purifying of the heart through faith. Therefore, by this connection, there is an admirable fitness, coherence, and propriety in the whole Scripture plan of atonement by Christ's blood, and justification through faith. Christ laid down his life for the sheep. They who are justified by his blood are his own, drawn to him by the cords of a man and the bands of a brother, having their souls knit to his, and living not in themselves, but by his Spirit living in them. (Gal. ii. 20.) Therefore, when he presents them before the presence of his Father, does not this close and intimate connection between him and his people entitle him to ask that those of whom he is bone of their bone, and flesh of their flesh, and who have him formed in them the hope of glory, be with him where he is, and have with him eternal life in fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore?

3d, Christ is supremely qualified to make propitiation for our sins, because of his own spotless innocence. The blood to make atonement on the altar must be that of a pure and holy victim. He who is substituted for the guilty, to save their souls, must be perfect in his innocence. Where can such victim be found, except in the holy Jesus. He was without spot, and unrebukable in the midst of a perverse generation. His life was the fulfilling of the law, for love to God and love to man animated his whole career. Of his love to God who shall speak worthily? We know not what passed in the communion he had with his father, and if we did know it, we could not utter the fulness of that intense love which made him say, "I delight to do thy will, O God." There are times when even a poor and imperfect believer finds his heart so full with love to God, that he cannot utter one half of what he feels; and

shall we dare for one moment to compare our love with his? His love glowed with intensest, purest flame; his zeal never flagged or remitted. He counted it no laborious taskwork, but his meat and drink, to fulfil the law. It was the native employment of his heart. "Thy law is within my heart." Though surrounded by temptations, and being beset by enemies, studying to allure him to evil, yet they never could succeed in raising within him a single wish in the slightest degree sinful to indulge, or in making him deflect a hair's breath from the strict line of study. The commandments of God are exceeding broad, and make man see an end of all perfection. Jesus kept them all. On his heart, sin, his deadly foe, could not succeed in throwing the slightest shadow of a stain. When the time came for offering himself up, if a vestige of sin could have been found in his heart, or of guilt on his lips, or of iniquity in his hands, his sacrifice must have been rejected as incompetent, the horror of his undertaking would have been trodden in the dust, and Satan would have triumphed to keep the world still under thralldom. Burning with eager desire thus to overthrow Christ, the prince of this world came, but neither in his past life could the accuser of the brethren find aught of which to arraign him, nor in him now could he find any hold by which to overturn his innocence. That innocence stood invulnerable, unassailable. It defied his most cunning wiles, his fiercest assaults. "The prince of this world cometh," said Jesus, "but he hath nothing in me." To evince the impotence of his malice, when Satan stirred up his slaves to take away the life of the Lamb of God, he could supply them with no slanderous charges against him, supported by even plausible testimony. The witnesses agreed not in their evidence. The charge on which, by the rulers of the Jews, our Redeemer was doomed to die, bore that he, being a man, made himself equal with God. Before Pilate he was accused of making himself a King. In these things his Father gave him witness that he spoke the truth, by the resurrection from the dead, declaring him to be the Son of God with power, and exalting him far above all principality and power to be King of kings and Lord of lords. But on these accusations Jesus was condemned to die; and was led forth bearing his cross. As if to render his innocence more conspicuous, slander was then constrained to be dumb, and the viperous tongue of calumny fettered in silence. Before wicked men had said, "Behold a man gluttonous and a wine bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners," and "He casteth out devils by the power of Beelzebub." Now the falsehood of these charges was too apparent for such to be hazarded; and in that season it was manifest that he and the prince of this world had nothing in common. Satan's workings His enemies felt in their own hearts; Jesus was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. The speeches with which they re-

viled him were such only as made more evident their blindness and cruelty of heart. "Thou savedst others, thyself thou canst not save." The innocency of the victim who was then bearing "our sins in his own body on the tree," which had been conspicuous through life, was attested in the hour of his departure, as bright and remarkable, by two singular witnesses. "We, indeed, receive the reward of our deeds," said the penitent malefactor to his companion, "but this man hath done nothing amiss." "And the centurion who watched him, glorified God, saying, certainly this was a righteous man." From the cross his innocence sent efficacious influence into the hearts of spectators, and already Christ crucified drew souls to himself. (John xii. 32.) Verily, an innocence which could thus, with all things against it, triumph in its sufferings and death over evil and idolatrous hearts, does make Jesus fit to be set forth as a propitiation for our sins.

4th, Jesus was a willing victim. What needs there a laboured proof of his willingness? Had he been unwilling, who could have ascended into heaven to bring Christ down? Had he not been willing, could he not have returned on high any moment he chose? Did he not show himself to be a willing victim when, though at his slight word, the men came out to seize him, and fell to the ground as dead, yet he yielded himself up to be led by them to scourging and death? But his willingness to be made "a curse for us, that he might redeem them who were under the curse," was not the consent of ignorance as to what was involved, on his part, in such an undertaking. When he said, "Lo I come," He went forth knowing all that should come upon him. He who dwelt in the bosom of the Father, from time everlasting, knew how evil and abominable sin is in his sight, and what tremendous infliction of wrath was due to the vindication of long despised and insulted justice. He knew well what tribulation and anguish he was undertaking to suffer, when he offered to make atonement to the uttermost for such as should come unto God by him. The sufferings inflicted by the hand of men he bore without expression of grief. "The Lord God," he says, "hath opened mine ear and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my check to them that plucked off the hair. I hid not my face from shame or spitting." And when he came to be baptized with his baptism of fire, even to undergo the final sharp trial of his Father's wrath, which made him "exceeding sorrowful even unto death," and pressed him into such depth of agony, that "he did sweat as it were great drops of blood;" we know that he submitted his will to his Father's, saying, "Not my will but thine be done." And when, on the cross, the extreme pang of his suffering was drawing nigh, and his Father hid his face from him, to the unutterable trouble of his spirit; when that heavenly light which had been the comfort of his heart was

cut off, and he was left alone, as if guilty, bearing the weight of wrath due to his Church's guilt in darkness and sorrow, encompassed by the prince of this world and his legions, who, knowing that this was their hour and power, burned to destroy him, he upheld his will. They panted, they hoped for success. They said, "He is cut off—he shall no more see light." (Psalm xli. 5-8.) But still, in this frightful hour, Jesus went calmly on, willingly submitting himself to "bear our sins in his own body on the tree." He proved his willingness by consummating the sacrifice. His enemies had assailed his life, but it was impregnable to their attacks. No man could take away his life. Death entered the world by sin; but he had never sinned, and therefore on him death had no power. Herein is a difference, absolutely indispensable to be observed, between the death of all other men and that of Christ. "No man hath power over the Spirit to retain it in the hour of death." "We must needs die." But Christ's life none could take from him. He laid it down of himself. (John x. 18.) To complete the sacrifice, it was necessary that Christ should die. Death was there, exulting in the prospect of a victim coming under his power, such as he had never smitten before—even of the Prince of Life being slain by his dart. But it was in Christ's power to be obedient, or not obedient, to death as he chose. All that was implied in Jesus dying we cannot know; but, from the strong dread expressed of it in the Psalms, and the earnest supplications not to be left in *hades*, or suffered to see corruption, we must suppose something fearful to have been involved; and that, as it was the last blow in our Redeemer's suffering, so it was the most awful. But, however great its terrors, looking both to the blow about to be struck, and to the effects which would result from it, and perceiving that, if he permitted death to bury his sting in him, that enemy would no more have power over those that should believe on his name, Christ, in the same spirit in which he had said, "Lo, I come," now "cried with a loud voice, It is finished, and gave up the ghost." Bowing his head, he made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in an everlasting righteousness.

And now, my soul, who knowest that there is no sacrifice sufficient to make atonement for sin but Christ, and that the sacrifice of Christ is all sufficient, why art thou so perpetually turning away from the refuge God hath set before thee, and seeking rest in the midst of thine own iniquities? Thou wouldst wish to be saved without Christ if thou couldst, but it is clearly impossible. Yet even with this impossibility demonstrated, thou resistest invitations to salvation by faith, and strugglest against believing. I see no help for me but in him who was lifted up to make reconciliation drawing me to himself by his Spirit. "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief."



## LECTURE VII.

## REGENERATION.

REV JAMES WALKER, CARNWATH.

“ Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus said unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”—JOHN iii. 3-6.

THIS passage contains a great truth: the greatest of truths: of all truths, the most solemn and blessed in regard to fallen man. When this truth is understood, felt, realized, man's soul has been the theatre of a mighty revolution.

1st, We are instructed here concerning the *necessity* of a thorough change in our spiritual being. Man is dead—“ dead in trespasses and sins;” he is essentially, in his nature, “ enmity against God”—the holy Sovereign of the Bible. Before it can be well with him, he must be the subject of a change as complete as our minds can conceive of. He must get life—have enmity turned to love—be created anew. Without this there is no heaven for him—he shall not have a glimpse of it—there is before him an eternity of unmingled sorrow. When shall our stupid earth be brave and wise enough to hear that doctrine?

2d, We are instructed farther concerning the *origin* of this change. It is of God the Holy Ghost. They in whom it is effected are a class of persons of whom it is affirmed, that they are “ born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” The “ re-  
newing of the Holy Ghost” is not a metaphor—it is a plain reality; it is not truth gifted like a God—it is not some dreamy influence floating round the soul—but the direct, personal, sovereign agency of the Spirit, which renews or regenerates. Christianity is shaken to its centre when this truth is spoken as if it were not meant. The Word is the “ sword of the Spirit;” He must draw it out of its scabbard of letters and wield it, otherwise it is but a mighty weapon lying by. How He wields it I cannot tell; “ it is the glory of God to conceal a thing”—why not to conceal this thing? But if you go out of the range of the Word, you go beyond the sweep of the weapon of life. That is practical knowledge on the matter.

3d, We are not instructed concerning any definite *method or form of operation* in this change. While there is the same Spirit, there are diversities of operation. One man's change is swift, sudden, decisive; another man's change is gradual and protracted. We speak after the manner of men, for, in reality, the change from death to life is instantaneous; but there is a meaning to us even in such phrases as "half-dead" or "half-alive." One man's change is more sharp, and another man's less so. How sharp was Paul's! how comparatively easy that of the Ethiopian eunuch. One man's conflict is in his intellect; another man's conflict is with some wretched habit. There is no all-embracing rule.

What, then, is the change itself—the change accomplished? To that I would now more specially direct your thoughts.

I. *In the first place, the change of regeneration means aversion from sin.* Sin is now a reality for the soul. Sin is now a fearful reality. Sin is now one of the two realities of the universe.

1. In exposition of this thought, I would say more generally, that it is *nature* in the regenerate spirit to be tender and sensitive in its dislike of sin. You see my meaning. There might be previously, in the unregenerate state, dislike to *some* sins—something like a wish to be rid of sin. It was not deep nor powerful—it was not as if there was an essential antagonism between the soul and iniquity. In the one case, the soul with sin could live in some peace—in tolerable enjoyment; occasionally annoyed, perhaps, but far from being in deep trouble. In the other case, sin is sorrow, agony, death, to the soul. In the one case, there is at best the antagonism of circumstance; in the other case, there is the antagonism of nature. As the chill breath of the sunless heaven, and the tall iceberg is to the plant of the tropical clime—as the gnawing ulcer or the sharp knife is to the sensitive frame of health—as the stain of dark dishonour is to the high and noble mind—so is sin to the regenerate character. There is peaceless hostility between them—they are known to each other only in the grapplings of fierce conflict—they meet but to flee from each other or to fight. Go down into the depths of this new nature; carefully inquire. Ask what it fears most, and it will answer—sin; what it hates most, and it will answer—sin; what is most unlovely in its eyes, most offensive to its taste, and it will answer—sin; what, if within its power, it would most readily call down the fire of heaven to destroy, and forth from its fathomless recesses, the voice of earnestness would still have the answer—sin—the regenerate and the unregenerate, both sin. Mark the infinite diversity between them in their sins. Sin is committed; the unregenerate man thinks little of it, if there be no worldly trouble—the regenerate man sits and mourns, not unlikely,

amid the hell-cloud of despair ; the unregenerate man is ready to sin again ; the regenerate man shakes and trembles at the very thought—his bosom tosses in trouble as the wind-lashed sea. Nathan speaks to David, and he falls swiftly from the throne of peace and joy, into the pit of unutterable sorrow. Elijah speaks to Jezebel, and she unleashes the hounds of death at him. We see what, in the new birth, is the soul's intense aversion from sin. This becomes, then, the sovereign, practical law of our being. Let us lay it to heart. "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin"—it is against his nature to do so—it is the piercing of his heart with cold steel when this habit of its life is glaringly overthrown.

2. *This aversion from sin on the part of the regenerate embraces all sin—sins of the heart as well as sins of the exterior life.* The regenerate man is not a saint abroad and a sinner at home in the secrecy of his spirit—fair as the sun, beneath the sun—within the thick veil which hides his bosom, black and impure. His care is to burnish the inside as brightly as the outside, often more brightly. He is a lie otherwise—a wretched picture for the moths to eat. The living soul fears, hates, shrinks from sin within itself, known only to itself and God. It is theft, in the feeling of the living soul, not merely when the hand of flesh has stolen the literal guinea from the purse, but as well when the covetous aspiration is entertained ; it is murder, not merely when the knife has flashed in the death stroke, or the poison been given which sucks life away, but as well when ill will is cherished ; it is adultery when there is the look of lust—pride, when there is the self complacent and disdainful thought. Regeneration is a change of spirit, and it is with the movements of the spirit, the heart, that it has primarily to deal. *To my eyes*, there is now visible among you no sin—sin seems absent. Had I heaven's eye, I should possibly behold, among those of you who are saints, one soul crushing an incipient emotion—another soul wrestling with a painful thought. Why does that shadow rest a while upon a brother's countenance—a suggestion of evil has flashed upon his mind that grieves his new nature. It is in the very heart of the soul that regeneration shall manifest its true character ; it is there it has most to do. And yet, the outward, as we call it, the actual transgression of the holy law, is the greater sin, even because it implies a greater intensity of the sinful disposition.

3. The aversion of the regenerate from sin, is further an aversion, whether as to outward act or inward feeling, *from whatever is sin in God's revealed declaration of the Word.* The Scripture is the soul's lamp, discovering for it, and displaying what is good and what is evil—supremely felt as such. The holy Scripture is sight, touch,

taste, to the living soul; according to the Scripture it sees—shrinks from or embraces—feels dislike or delight. In submission to the Scripture, the conscience affirms the sinfulness of a thing, and the nature of the new birth regards it with enmity. Thus in regeneration the list of sins is lengthened, such as those being added, pride, worldliness, self-righteous complacency, inattention or coldness in directly religious duties, and so forth; from those, as well as from other sins more gross, there is the aversion we speak of. Thus too, that distinction between great and little sins, which would make little sins no sins at all, is buried; for nought which God condescends to command a loving child of his dare fancy little, for when heaven's voice is heard it is felt that every faintest articulation should be reverently engraven on the heart. It is a happy sign of one when his conscience bows reverently before the word—having found practical reality and meaning in the warning, “if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the book of life, and from the holy city.” This, then, is the law of regenerate nature—aversion from sin, from sin of the heart and soul, from sin as opposition to God's revealed will. It is well with us when our souls feel sin to be a dark plague—most blessed when we weep for it, whether in ourselves or others; it is man's true grandeur when, with the Psalmist, he can say, “mine eyes are rivers of waters because *men* keep not God's law;” it is beauty, joy, greatness, this distaste of—this grief in all iniquity.

II. In the *second* place, only putting what has been already said in another form, *the change of regeneration means inclination towards God*. Aversion from sin implies inclination to God; the soul cannot hate sin and not love God: the one is involved in the other—the taste in the distaste, the love in the hatred. The subject, however, is presented to our minds in greater completeness when it is regarded in both aspects: having given, then, a practical illustration of the new life in its aversion from and distaste of sin, let us briefly also give an illustration of that life in its tastes and tendencies towards God.

1. The living God has hitherto been a dream; sometimes a dream faint as the faintest vision of the night, which flits across the mind and leaves no trace; sometimes a dream of higher power and more definite form, as in the terrors of superstition—but still at best a dream. There has been no real earnest dealing with the living one—none; the eye hath never pierced earth's starry canopy and truly seen the throne—the pure in heart alone *see* God. But a birth takes place within the soul; a new nature is conceived and brought forth; the Invisible becomes visible, and with Jesus this nature rises to His presence, and lives on His love.

Event of wonder—is it not? Joyously the cedar and the rose in the sunshine and breezes of spring pour forth their nature, their life in buds; joyously the lark expresses forth her nature as she flings wide her morning carols; joyously the loving child gives nature vent in kindnesses and caresses and fond words; joyously, too, the nature of the regenerate is declared by its flight to the Mediator's feet, to enjoy the presence and love of a reconciled God; there it is pleasant to abide, in meditation, praise, love, obedience—the soul honestly at times affirming, “I will not go down, I will build me a tent; here I will stay and be joyful in my God.” Even when clouds are compassing it, when God seems away; could you listen at the door of the heart of life you would hear such vehement longings as these, “O God thou art my God; my soul thirsteth for thee.” “My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.” “My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God, when shall I come and appear before God.” As “pillars of smoke,” so the hearts of the regenerate ascend. There is a something in them, which with a sovereign influence, bends them upwards to seek the bosom of Godhead—that is the glorified Jesus.

2. I present the fact of these tendencies of life in the soul in a more practical shape—the regenerate nature will love and long for the ordinary means of God's presence and enjoyment. These are what we call the ordinances—the reading of the word, the house of God, the Sabbath, prayer. To be regenerate and not to delight in these, is a contradiction—it is to live without bread and water. One's soul is not alive if it likes not the word; life as instinctively loves the truth, as the child its mother's breast; if it likes not the house of God where the Spirit of life is wont to be given, and life mingles with life, and warms and blazes—if it likes not the Sabbath, the foretaste, the preparation of eternity—if it likes not prayer, the strong arm of life, the key of life, more abundant. What we say is, that the soul which is regenerate loves these things, desires them, needs them. Such is its nature—its nature, as it is the nature of the fish to swim and the fowl to fly. Men mistake us in this matter. For example, in the case of the Sabbath: We affirm the regenerate love the Sabbath—the Sabbath is to them a delight—the Sabbath of the law is joy to them. We affirm this to one class and another. The world pretends to reply in the name of charity, “You mean by this to exclude from your Sabbath those mental and material relaxations, so much needed in this busy, unquiet world; you mean to take from the wearied labourer his Sabbath party, and his Sabbath trip, and his Sabbath newspaper; you mean to make the Sabbath a dull, gloomy, miserable time. This is not love—this is not the spirit of the religion of goodness and love. We answer, that there is

part of truth and part of falsehood in this. We do mean—the Bible means—that the Sabbath be a day of direct and continued devotion to God ; but not that it be a weary, sad day—rather that, of all days, it be the happiest. Let it be understood, that it is sin to have a weary Sabbath, even as it is a sin to have a drunken one. It is nought but sin which makes a Sabbath's devotion dull ; it is nought but sin if a Sabbath's exercises afford not a noble gladness ; the devotion, the exercises of the Sabbath, afford suitable refreshment for those in whom there is the victory over sin and the nature of God. Consider ; it may be very good for a child to amuse itself with the soap bubbles which glance for a moment in the sunbeam and vanish, or to string the berries of the mountain-ash, and be as pleased as any queen with her necklace of pearls ; but for a grown-up man to engage for any length of time in such occupations is ridiculous. None but the idiot will do it. You mark the aptness of the illustration : if man be a poor creature of earth—his hopes and affections and joys shut up within a few years of time in a troublous world—it may be becoming enough in him to console and divert his mind by a Sabbath of paltry amusement. But for man with eternity heaving in his bosom—with his hopes, and affections, and joys, and longings before God in heaven—it is childish a Sabbath of that sort. A day of rest and consolation for man regenerate—a Sabbath suited to him—is the institution of the Bible ; a day of earnest devotion—a Sabbath of high and cheering thoughts of his home hereafter. That is the relaxation he requires. That is the diversion he needs amid earth's din and toil. That is the amusement which gives new nerve and sinew to him. Not then as a drudgery—nor in pride and self-complacent or superstitious formality—but as satisfying the prevailing dispositions and instincts of the soul, these external ordinances are needed and sought for by the regenerate. God's presence is found in them—God's blessing is dispensed in them ; therefore the soul must love them if it be of God. How deeply have I felt the truth of these thoughts, when I have heard the hard-working man say he wearied for the Sabbath ! not to be then in physical repose, but to have repose of heart over his Bible and in the house of God, and in prayer, even when the Sabbath was his day of hardest labour by the length of his journey. The word, prayer, the church, the Sabbath, are wells of salvation the saintly heart demands.

3. Very briefly, I remark further, that the regenerate soul seeks to enjoy God *through all the business and occupations of life*, though not, of course, so vividly as in the ordinances of direct devotion. If it be not so, all a man's religious emotion is no better than unstamped coin. It is most certainly not regenerate emotion. It is flame upon the canvas.

The man that is truly born again would “glorify and enjoy” God in the kind word—the good turn—the humble demeanour—purity of thought, and speech, and action. The regenerate nature flows forth in fruits of “*love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance;*” it guides, the heart, the hand, the tongue, the eye; it rules our morning, noon, and night; its influence is realized behind the team and the counter—in the closet and on the highway—among yon band of labourers and in the church—in every thing, in every place; at any time it is its disposition to be near and to honour God. The saint would make the whole of life a sanctuary; he is a poor saint otherwise. Is he a saint at all? Brethren, believe it—remember it; when there is life in the heart, and health in the constitution—life circles through every vein; life plays through every hour and every act of your history. Life in the heart and death in the members is monstrous. Over the footsteps of Jesus Christ—over the path whose name is “*continually doing good*”—the radiance of God’s love is shed. There every living soul habitually would bask in it; else all is vain. Averse from sin, the regenerate have found and delight in loving God—delight in those divine ordinances in which he comes near—delight in the practical life of Jesus, which gleams with his glorious presence—is the noblest temple thereof. The regenerate nature rises to God. That is its tendency—that is the bent of the saintly spirit. It rises sometimes more, sometimes less vigorously. It has many a vale between it and the summit. It stumbles, falls, is wearied; but still indomitably its course is for “mount Zion, the city of the living God.”

III. In the third place, *I at once impress and illustrate these truths by practical cases.* What Scriptural ones shall we find?—plenty of them. The two we select are those of Mary the Magdalene, and Saul the persecutor. The story of each tells, with great and beautiful power, the reality of the New Birth, and its meaning. Mary has been among the vilest of her race—among the dregs of a world of sin—impure, unclean, seven times a sinner. Shall she rise again? Whose heart swells with tender and penitent affection at the tear-washed feet of Jesus?—whose heart bids the eye not turn from yonder cross, but mournfully linger there even till and after the stars begin their evening hymn?—whose waking spirit will not let the heavy eyelid fall, but with earliest dawn, amid the fresh odours of the lonely garden, breathes towards the rocky grave where one is lately buried?—who is she of love so singular to the blessed One—of Spirit so pure and ethereal—clad in the snowy raiment of the skies? It is of the Magdalene I speak—it is the regenerate Mary I describe. See there

one lifted from the lowest grave, shrinking from sin, which henceforth is to her only a dagger for the bosom of her dearest, having her joy in the Lord—his will, his word, his presence. That is the meaning of life. Saul, his character at once arises up before your minds—the merciless zealot who aided at the martyrdom of the brave and holy Stephen—the iron persecutor who thirsted for blood—and had conscientiously extracted from his bosom the milk of human kindness—the self-complacent, self-righteous Pharisee who fancied that he could bribe heaven! This is Saul. Paul the Apostle of our Lord, your minds too are familiar with his character; the humble man who called himself the “chief of sinners”—who gloried not in himself but in the cross; the man of loving, earnest, pitiful soul, who became the servant of all to win them to Christ, whose spirit was filled with tears instead of curses for his adversaries; the man who so shrunk back from the thought of offending Jesus of Nazareth, that he walked in weakness, and fear, and much trembling, “desiring to depart and be with him,” for ever in pure unbroken fellowship. Paul the apostle is Saul regenerate; Saul with a new nature in his bosom; Saul with the heart of cold stone, removed by the grace of heaven, and a heart of flesh, soft, warm, pure, given in its room. Mary and Paul signify what it is to live again. Beyond the Scripture striking illustrations teem. The wild, the profligate, the blasphemous Augustin, arrested in the full tide of his ungodliness, and then as a hoary saint mourning the sins of his childhood, while much of his life has now been spent in daily and nightly prayers! John Bunyan beseeching rather that his soul should be lashed by the fire of an agony, than that sin should have peaceful supremacy, and beholding as with the literal eye the infinite “beauty of holiness!” Robert M’Cheyne, desiring to have the painful convictions of sin manifest in a smitten soul seeking comfort at his hands—*feeling*, not reasoning, his way to the thought, that in essence, holiness and happiness are one! In these instances is not our truth spoken with awful eloquence and power? Are not sin and God the two realities of the earth of all worlds? Is it not life and glory when the soul rushes from sin by the way of the cross to the Father? Is there anything else great here, save this sovereign feeling of dislike to sin, and affection for God in Christ?

I draw to a conclusion with two explanatory observations:—

1st, Of course we have always supposed and spoken under the idea of the truth being clearly present to your minds, that the regenerate soul lies at the feet of Christ. There alone, with peaceful and penitent aversion from sin, it obtains the enjoyment of God. As, on the one hand, it is a dark and horrible delusion that the soul unborn, in the unchanged



enmity of its nature, ever draws near the cross to partake of life in God's love ; so on the other, it is a delusion as dark that the soul should ever as regenerate partake of the life it longs for, unless in Christ. Life, regenerate nature, is ever united to the Tree of Life ; on the branch *then* the sunshine and dews of Jehovah's affection descend.

2d, While we have said that the prevailing bent of the regenerate soul is away from sin and towards God, in his person, nature, will, and ordinances, we have not said that the soul has ceased to do with sin. Very far from it. The saint traverses a battle-field to his rest. Only with much conflict, many wounds, many stumbles, occasional overthrows, his course is for the most part that of a victor. Around the soul on earth there is a body of death, wisely left to try and purify it more thoroughly—it is there, however, by protest—it is not welcome. In reference to it there is ever the earnest exclamation of Paul, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from it."

Brother, where is thy soul ? In the grave or on the Mediator's crown ?—among the worms of wrath, malice, lust, worldliness, unbelief, or before the throne of love in the world of life ? Have the vaults of heaven rung with music on thine account ? Or does this whole matter cost thee little thought ?

Of all possible communications a man can make to himself that is the most darkly impressive—Death is upon me ! One shrinks from making it even while there is the silent idea that it might be truly made. It is hard to have the courage to receive a thing about oneself so grievous and sad. Thus it is a mighty effort for the sinner to descend into his bosom—to search the awful secrets of its innermost chambers—to discover the heart there in death and corruption, kept as in a temporary vault for its deeper grave. With many a shrewd suspicion he will do everything to keep himself from being assured that his suspicion is real. But is this wisdom ? Is it not a most miserable method of consolation ? Would it not be wiser and greater—happier for him to know all the truth, even though sharp sorrows should result. His sorrows shall wake up within him those cries for help which, rising higher than the highest star, even to the throne of grace—shall bring down the willing spirit. Already he lives. Better to pass through a valley of death into infinite life, than through a valley of bright life, could that be, into infinite death !

You live ? Then you have left the sepulchre—it can no more be your home. You have trodden the path of Christ—you have ascended in heart to the right hand of glory—your life is "hidden" there. Is it not so ? Is it not your prayer to have it so more and more ?

## LECTURE VIII.

BY THE REV. SAMUEL MARTIN, BATHGATE.

“ And the Spirit and the bride say, Come ; and let him that heareth say, Come ; and let him that is athirst come ; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”—REV. xxii. 17.

THE Book of Revelation, intended to stand last in the canon of Scripture, is fuller in its details respecting the judgments of the Lord, and the final results of conduct, whether good or bad, than any other part of the sacred volume. The greater part of it is a narrative of God's outward judgments—the index generally of future doom on the enemies of his church, and on certain corrupted forms of Christianity. Towards the close is presented first the final struggle which Christ's cause and people shall have to maintain with all the enemies of the church, confederate with all the powers of darkness in one desperate attempt for the overthrow of Christianity, and in which, cheered by the presence and aided by the might of the Captain of Salvation, the soldiers of the cross shall be triumphant. Then we have the judgments inflicted on these discomfited enemies of Christ: they shall be “ cast into the lake of fire burning with brimstone.” And in the twenty-first, and commencement of the twenty-second chapters, we have a magnificent and most attractive description of the blessed state to which the righteous shall yet be advanced—a state in which they shall dwell with God, in which he shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain—a state in which the glory of the Lord shall lighten them, and there shall be no more curse, but of the river of the water of life they shall drink abundantly and be satisfied. To confirm all these assurances of doom on his enemies, and of blessing to his friends, and to make them tell with deeper emphasis on the thoughts and purposes of men, he that signified them to the church by his servant John, saith at the seventh verse of this chapter, “ Behold, I come quickly.” I come quickly to make good every word which hath been spoken, and to make all men know in their own experience that faithful and true are all the forewarnings, promises, and threatenings that have thus been held out to them. “ I come quickly ; therefore, blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.” And in 11-15, you will find how the strain of solemn

warning and admonition is resumed and finally wound up. But while, in a manner so solemn and impressive, the great issues of life and death are thus brought finally before the readers of this book, and left to tell on their minds with their overwhelming weight—while life and death, blessing and cursing, are set before them—the Lord cannot, as it were, quit the children of men and close his addresses to them without making one more most earnest and affectionate appeal to sinners, not to harden their hearts and reject the blessings of salvation—without making one farther attempt to persuade them to come to God—without again holding up to their view the readiness with which they may have access to all the blessings of redemption, to all the joys of everlasting life. “The Spirit and the bride say, come; and let him that heareth say, come; and let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”

I. “The Spirit says, come.” “When Christ ascended on high, he received gifts for men.” Chief of the gifts thus committed to him to bestow on the children of men, is the Holy Spirit, of whose coming and work he had abundantly spoken to his disciples. “Being by the right hand of God exalted, he received of the Father the promised Holy Ghost.” (Acts ii. 33.) It is the great honour of his glorified state that he has the Spirit to give to men. (John vii. 39.) And the work on which the Spirit is sent forth is to testify of Christ, to declare to men his fullness, and to beseech them to receive his unsearchable riches. “He shall testify of me,” said Christ, “he shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine, and show it unto you.” (John xv. 26; xvi. 14, 8-11.) His work, as described by Christ, should be to set forth the Saviour to men’s souls, to commend him to them, to persuade them to come to him, and, by destroying their false confidences, to persuade them effectually to put their trust in him, and to value and seek a part in the blessings of which he is the author. Such, accordingly, has been the object of the Spirit’s operations amongst the children of men, saying to them in effect, if not in language, “Come.” Even in regard to his influence and work, previous to Christ’s appearance on earth, we know that this was the object which he ever had in view. For “the prophets,” Peter writes, “who prophesied of the grace that should come to us, searched what and what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified before hand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.” The sufferings of Christ, and the glory connected with these, were the subject of the Spirit’s testimony ere Christ came in the flesh. The Spirit lifted so far the veil which hung over God’s purposes, and displayed to the faith and hope of the Old Testament saints, and to the

knowledge of those who were not saints, the Saviour to come. And in tracing so much as the Old Testament contains of the work of the promised deliverer, his character, and the blessed results which should attend the humble believing reception of him, the Spirit was just as distinctly calling on men to come to that Saviour that they might share in the fruits of his work and the benefits he bestows, as when by the lips of the prophet he expressly cried, "Look unto him and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth." Such is the Spirit's call and invitation still. If "holy men of old spake," in the days of the Jewish dispensation, "as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," not less by him were those men guided who have recorded to us in the New Testament the life and doctrines of our Lord. And what is the aspect which their whole writings bear to sinners? Varied as are the forms in which the truth is set forth—now expostulation, now reproof, now threatening, now counsel or intreaty—sometimes simple statements of truth, sometimes close and affecting application of it to the heart—sometimes magnificent pictures of the glory to come, sometimes appalling glimpses of the misery which shall wrap the unconverted sinner's soul for ever—sometimes discourse of Christ's humiliation and sufferings, sometimes of the majesty in which he now sits enthroned to impart the infinite blessings of salvation to the souls of men, or of his coming with all his holy angels to judge the quick and the dead—what is the strain in which, through them all, the Spirit addresses the sinner, but just this, "Come, come out of your sinful death-like state; come to the Saviour, shelter with him you shall have from the wrath which follows hard after sin, and with him you shall have freely and abundantly, without money and without price, all blessings and good for time and eternity. O come to him that your souls may live."

While, by the written word, the Spirit hath ever said, and doth still say, "Come, come, ye weary and heavy laden, and Christ will give you rest; come ye sick and wounded, and the great Physician will heal you," he has made provision for the continual utterance of that invitation in the ears of men. The silent word might be neglected, and the Spirit's call and invitation therein therefore unheard and unknown. But other provision has the Spirit made for proclaiming his testimony, and carrying his call to the knowledge and conscience of men. By the ministers of the New Testament does the Spirit bear his testimony, and address his call unto men. "Tarry ye," said our Lord to his disciples, (Luke xxiv), "in the city of Jerusalem, till ye be endued with power from on high"—for what end?—"that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in Christ's name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost

is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth." (Acts i.) The promise in both these declarations was that the Spirit should rest upon them, should teach them to make known to sinners Christ and him crucified, and should use them to invite sinners in Christ's name to a full participation in all the blessings of his purchase. Accordingly so it was. When on the day of Pentecost the Spirit was sent forth upon the disciples in fulfilment, as Peter said, of the prophecy, "In those days I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; and on my servants and my handmaidens will I pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophecy," we find that apostle, so timid before, so afraid to confess Christ, as even at the challenge of a servant maid, to deny with oaths that he knew him—we find him immediately preaching Christ to those who had despised and slain him: "Ye men of Israel," he broke forth, "hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you, by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know, him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain;" and so on, preaching Christ to them, and concluding with the earnest exhortation, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Christ, for the remission of sins?" (Acts ii. 22-38; see also, iv. 8-12; v. 10-12.) And what was the source of this preaching? Peter, *filled with the Holy Ghost*, said, "We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged upon the tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things and *so is also the Holy Ghost*, whom God hath given to them that obey him." In short, the assurance was fulfilled in them, "It is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost which speaketh in you." (Mark xiii. 11.) And speaking "not with the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth," they bare testimony of Jesus who saves his people from their sins, made known the savour of his name in every place, and called on men to come to him and be blest in him. And still under the gospel, which is "the ministration of the Spirit," doth the Spirit employ the ministers of the New Testament to bear his invitation to the souls of men. And however inferior in every thing that constitutes men, what Paul terms himself and his fellow-apostles, "able ministers of the New Testament," those who now all unworthily speak the words of eternal life unto men, do bear to them the Spirit's call, by them the Spirit doth now beseech men to be reconciled unto God. He commissions them to intreat men to "come"—to come to him who will in nowise cast them out, who will gladden them

with the assurance of his love, and introduce them into possession of all the privileges of the sons of God.

II. "The bride saith, Come." The bride, who thus joins in the Spirit's invitation, is the same that we read of chap. xix. 6-8. The description there given of her apparel, "the righteousness of saints," teaches that this bride of the Lamb is the body of saints whom he has redeemed to himself with his precious blood—the Church, who, like the first bride on earth, was taken out of her husband's bleeding side. This bride, the Church, doth also say, "Come." The bride is conjoined with the Spirit in the same call; "the Spirit and the bride say, Come." The reason of this has already appeared in our considering the invitation as proceeding from the Spirit, viz. that it is chiefly through the instrumentality of the Church that the Spirit proclaims its invitation, and urges it upon men. The Spirit, who rested on Christ without measure, and anointed him for his office, spake of him, and commended him to men in all his public ministry. It spake for him, that is, it pointed him out to men, when, at his baptism, it descended upon him like a dove. It spake for him in his miracles, for which "he was anointed with the Holy Ghost, and with power"—(Acts x. 38)—and in the voice which issued from the excellent glory, which proclaimed him God's well-beloved Son. But, at all times, the Spirit's testimony to Jesus hath been borne chiefly through the church, and now it is wholly by the church that it makes him known, and sets before sinners the riches of his grace. In the word which the Spirit has entrusted to the Church, "the pillar and ground of the truth," the Spirit exhibits the invitations of the Gospel. And the Church itself, which is "the temple of the Holy Ghost," speaks the mind of the Holy Ghost, and holds up to men the gracious words of God, the testimonies of his marvellous love and mercy through Jesus Christ. The church, then, being the instrument by which the Spirit fulfils its work of glorifying Christ, one reason appears for the Spirit and the bride being joined in the same invitation. And there is this further reason for that junction, that it is only because the Spirit dwelleth in the church, and just so far as he doth dwell in it, that it bears testimony to Jesus, and shows forth his praise. What is the Church? The body of believers taken out from amongst the apostate sinners of Adam's race. And what hath made them more sensible than the sinners, from whom they have been separated, of the glory of Christ, the excellence of his salvation, and the blessed fulness of God? What but the Spirit's teaching? Once they were just as blind, dull, dead to all these things, as the dullest and most insensible sinner that lives. But the Spirit taught and changed them. He that moved over the deep of old to bring order out of its

confusion, and light in upon its darkness, hath gone forth on the dead waste of the sinner's heart, which he found void of every thing but evil,—hath dispelled its darkness about the things of God—destroyed its insensibility to them—and, showing to it the love and work of Christ, and the glory of God as revealed in his face, hath thoroughly changed the inner man, and brought forth a new creature in Christ Jesus. Were it not that the Spirit hath thus wrought upon every one of those who, in their collective capacity, constitute the Church the Lamb's bride, they never would have seen any thing of the glory of Christ, or of those green pastures and still waters to which the good Shepherd introduces his sheep. And it is just so far as he hath taught them, that they understand these things—just so far as he influences them that they prize them—and just so far as he dwells in the Church, and moves its acts and its utterances, that the bride joins in the invitation, "Come, come to taste the love of Christ—come to taste that God is gracious." And therefore is it that the Spirit and the bride are joined in the same invitation.

The bride is the Spirit's great instrument in inviting men to Gospel blessings; and because the Spirit dwells in the bride, she proclaims the honour of Christ's name, and the glory of his grace. But not on this account only doth the bride press the invitation "to come." The Church hath come herself, and therefore would she have others to come. She hath come, and coming, she has been made partaker of all the blessings which Christ bought with his blood. She hath received the blessings of favour with God, protection from him, and all the joyful hopes of everlasting life. And when she contrasts her present state of assured peace and triumphant hope, with the fearful pit and miry clay out of which she was taken, O how does her heart glow with deepest and most constraining gratitude to him who hath redeemed her, and that at the unspeakable price of his own sufferings and death; and, glowing with devout and fervent gratitude to him, the Church cannot but long that others should come to him to help her to acknowledge his grace, and to show forth his praise. And as the Church's gratitude is mingled with, and sustained by, most holy approval of Christ's character, and admiration of his glorious person, she longs that others should also behold his grace and be captivated therewith, and therefore calls on them to come, and see, and taste, that they may lend their voices to the joyful strains in which she celebrates her Lord as "fairer than the sons of men," and as "the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely."

While the Church's views of Christ, and ardent love to him, cause her thus to echo the Spirit's invitation, she is moved and constrained, by her experience of the blessings which have attended her own obedience to the invitation, to desire earnestly that others may obey it also. Blessed

as she is with the safety, peace, and joy connected with receiving Christ—enabled to lift up her eyes to the Ruler of all as her friend—emboldened to pour out all her sorrows and distresses into the bosom of a Father in heaven, and compassed about with his everlasting arms—how devoutly does she long that those who remain in the miserable state out of which she has been redeemed, may come forth from it, and obtain part in the precious endowment of joy and blessing which has been conferred upon her! Looking on them, slaves of sin and Satan, separated from God, the fountain of life and good, in all their fancied pleasures but feeding on ashes, or grasping at the grapes of Sodom, and hastening on to a full reaping of the miserable fruits of sin in the bitterness of the second death, with what eagerness does she thirst for their recovery—with what importunity and melting tenderness must she beseech them to return to God and live! “Come—come to the Saviour; he will in no wise cast you out. Oh, we have found his ‘love better than wine,’ his favour to be life, his loving-kindness to be better than life, his consolations to be most gladdening and satisfying. Come, and you shall share in them all. Delay not for your unworthiness. He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Delay not from your love of earthly good. O it is as the small dust of the balance when compared with his blessing. Come to him and he will give you his unsearchable riches. Come to him, he will bless you now, and make your interests sure for eternity.”

III. “Let him that heareth say, come.” *To hear* in Scripture usage, very often signifies *to obey*. Thus, “hear, ye children, the instruction of a father.” The disobedient are described as “children that will not hear the law of the Lord.” This very natural use of the word is quite common throughout Scripture. If this be the sense in which it is employed here, then this clause of our text is an admonition to every one who obeys the voice of the Lord, and receives his invitation, to make that invitation known to others, and press them to accept of it. It is an exhortation to each individual believer to do that which the whole Church, as a body, is described as doing—“the bride saith, come.” And it must be remembered by all Christians, that though the Church, in its very existence, in the doctrines it holds, and in the praise of the Redeemer which it holds forth, does bear continual testimony to Christ, and continually give utterance to the invitation “come,” yet on each individual the obligation lies to shew forth in his own place, and by his own endeavours, the honour of his Lord, and to do what in him lies to win over others from the service of Satan. No one is released from this obligation by the general testimony of the bride. Each believer is bound



for himself, by all the obligations of gratitude and duty, to declare the praises of him who hath redeemed him to himself. And every motive and every feeling, which in the Church generally move to an acknowledgment of Christ, and a calling of sinners to him, will be felt by each believer urging and stimulating him to show forth the praises of him who hath called him out of darkness into his marvellous light. This duty, then, in obedience to the Saviour's command, let each believer fulfil. "Let him that heareth say, come." Bear witness, ye who know Christ, and have received salvation in him, to the Redeemer's love, to the fulness of his salvation, and to the blessedness of all that put their trust in him. Call others to share in your joys, blessings, and privileges. Win them, draw them, persuade them to come to Christ, that they too may participate in all spiritual blessings in heavenly things in Christ Jesus, and may magnify him who hath done great things for them.

It ought not to be omitted that the expression, "him that heareth," may have here just its ordinary meaning. It may be understood as a call upon every man to whom the tidings of mercy and salvation are addressed, to proclaim these tidings to others, and to help forward the universal publication of the grace and gospel of Christ. The bride gives continual utterance to the gospel invitation. But so desirous is the Spirit to bring men to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus, that he calls on every one to whom that truth is made known to send it onward to others, and to press on them the gospel's gracious call; to be a preacher as it were of Christ, and of all his fulness, to the souls of men. And though to a believer such a charge may seem peculiarly appropriate, and will come home with peculiar power, yet well may it be laid on all. The charge comes from Christ, to whom hath been committed all power in heaven and in earth. Seated, therefore, on the throne of universal dominion, he has right to give command to all, and to require from them immediate and unqualified obedience. The charge is to seek the honour, and make known the praise of the Sovereign Lord of all; and this every one is bound most heedfully and diligently to advance. It is a charge which calls on men to concur with the purposes of the one God, and to promote them; and what creature is there that can plead exemption from obligation to do his Maker's will, and to advance his purposes? For no other end can creatures be conceived to have been made. And it is a charge which calls on those to whom it is addressed, to promote the chiefest good of their fellow-men; and this every human being is bound to forward with his whole heart and might. And therefore, by the power of manifold considerations and unanswerable reasons, is every man without exception, who hears the gospel sound, bound to take part

in conveying it to others—in prolonging the strains of the everlasting gospel, till they reach with saving effect all the children of men. In the spirit of this charge sang the Christian poet,

Salvation, oh salvation,  
The joyful sound proclaim,  
Till each remotest nation  
Has learnt Messiah's name.

Waft, waft ye winds his story,  
And you, ye waters, roll,  
Till like a sea of glory,  
It spread from pole to pole.

Till o'er our ransomed nature,  
The Lamb for sinners slain,  
Redeemer, King, Creator,  
In bliss return to reign.

IV. "Let him that is athirst come." This is a special application of the general call to a certain class of persons—those that are athirst. Who are described by this expression? To which we may reply, Who is there that is not described by it? Of the mental emotion signified by *thirst*, that is, vehement desire after good, who is not the subject? On very various objects may that desire be fixed; but who is not acquainted with it? Some thirst for *the pardon of their sins*. By the teaching of the word and Spirit, or by the rebukes of natural conscience, they have been aroused to a sense of their guilt in God's sight; and, trembling with apprehension of his wrath, they feel that the blessing most needed and most precious in their case is the removal of their iniquity. For this they thirst. Let them, then, as here invited, come to Christ. In him they shall find the blessing they need, the blessing for which they long with most intense desire, conscious that without it they must perish. He hath purchased for sinners the forgiveness of sins. Bearing sins in his own body on the tree, he "hath blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was contrary to us, and hath taken it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;" and thus hath made peace for the guilty. And to him sinners shall not apply in vain for the taking away of sin. To him coming, they shall find their sin forgiven, and, justified freely by his grace, they shall have peace with God. To him then come ye who are heavy laden with sin. He will take the burden off your shoulders, and introduce you to the liberty and joy of the children of God.

Some thirst for *everlasting life*. Won by the glorious glimpses which God's word gives of the honour and felicity of eternal life, or impressed by the worth of this blessing as clearly appearing to all who will deliberately ponder it, they earnestly long for an assured hope of

everlasting life, and for security that theirs shall be the infinitely blessed inheritance which is reserved in heaven. And if in their earthly lot they have been sore tried—if affliction has attended them, and God's billows gone over them—with how much more eager longing do they look away from earth, and its trials, and thirst for that bright land where "there is no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying," where "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes," and where "the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them and lead them to the living fountains of water!" O let such thirsty souls obey Christ's call, "If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink." Come to him! He has removed every barrier that stood in the sinner's way to the mansions of the blest. He has satisfied the law, and cancelled the sentence which would have consigned sinners over to everlasting death. He has purchased life and everlasting blessedness for men. And now, whoever takes hold of him by faith, shall have inheritance among them that are sanctified. Come, then, to him ye thirsty souls. Encouraged by the knowledge of his ability to grant you the desires of your heart, encouraged by his gracious promises and invitations, come to him. Come in faith and joy. He will bring you near to God now as your Father in heaven. He will seal to you the purchased inheritance. He will cause you to rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Without attempting farther to specify the objects for which different men vehemently long, all thirst *for happiness*. In whatever object men may conceive happiness to be found—in whatever quarter they may look for it—all do desire it, all must desire and pursue it. Many have no distinct idea where happiness is to be found. They thirst for it, but they know not its dwelling place. Perhaps they have engaged in the world's business. But though the bustle, and the jostling with others who were pursuing the same path, might engross them for a time, they have felt that there were powers and desires which such occupations, and all the gains which reward them, could not satisfy. And still, therefore, with longing eyes have they looked around for true and durable happiness. Or it may be that the objects on which they had fixed their hearts, have been taken from them. Their wealth may have been lost. Disappointment may have attended their toils. Their hearts may have been wounded by sorrow, "the desire of their eyes taken away with a stroke." And thus shaken out of their former joys, and made to feel on how insecure a foundation these had been built, they are cast loose to seek happiness somewhere else, perhaps with little hope now that they ever shall attain it. O let all such, and all others to whom real and abiding happiness is as yet an object of desire, and not of possession, hearken to the call which bids "him that is athirst, come." In

the Gospel, in Christ whose work and salvation it makes known, there is provision for securing and imparting happiness to the children of men. There the fountain of true blessedness is opened to the thirsty and miserable. There is "the river whose streams make glad the city of our God," and cheer even with everlasting consolation every thirsty down-cast soul which betakes itself to them. Come to these, and you shall be satisfied. Come to him who can gratify the earnest desires which you launch forth after some unknown good, which is continually escaping you. Come to him, he can "minister to a mind diseased, and pluck a rooted sorrow from the breast." He can fill you with "peace and joy in believing." "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money, and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." (Is. lv. 1, 2.)

V. "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." The preceding invitations might seem abundantly sufficient in the generality of their form, to give every one the fullest assurance of his welcome to come, and of the readiness with which he shall, on coming, be received, and made partaker of all the blessings of which the Gospel brings the knowledge. And especially when it is said, "let him that is athirst come," there would seem to be an invitation held out, which not only warrants every one who desires his own happiness to come, but should bear down all those doubts, difficulties, and objections, which men, particularly if oppressed with a sense of sin, and dread of wrath, are so ingenious in raising in their own way to forbid their approach. But even this an anxious soul would manage to get over, and would discover reasons for repelling from itself the comfort which it is fitted to impart. It might say to itself, "True, he that thirsteth is invited to come; but I do not thirst in the right way; or I do not thirst enough;" or by some other such plea it might, and in many instances would, deny the application to itself of the invitation given, or deny that its case came within it, and so make void, as to any present comfort or future good, even this most general and encouraging assurance. And the Lord, who understands all the difficulties of a troubled spirit, who knows how the convinced sinner writes bitter things against himself, and can hardly be persuaded that there is any good, mercy, hope, or salvation for him, has very graciously consulted for our weakness, and our proneness to doubt or suspect his kindness to us sinners, and has, as it were, taken pains to remove every thing on which doubt could be built, or out of which an

agonized spirit could bring an argument against itself, when he has proclaimed in language of such unbounded, unconditional freeness, "whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." It is not asked what the man's character is, to what class he belongs, or what predisposition he may have towards God, and his salvation. It is simply, What is his present wish? Would he now have the water of life? Here it is for him *freely*, without money, and without price. No difficulty in his way; no particular preparation required, respecting his having or not having of which he might torment himself; but will he have it? Does he see its desirableness, and long to have it? Let him then put forth his hand boldly to take of the water of life freely.

While encouragement so ample is thus given him, he is called to a provision that does most seasonably meet his thirst, weakness, and weariness. It is the *water of life*, to the full fountain of which he is made welcome to come. Faint within such a sinner's soul is hope, drooping, dying. Languid are all the movements, feeble and low the tokens of life within him. Laden with iniquity, and smitten with the fears to which it gives birth, his "moisture is turned into the drought of summer." "The arrows of the Almighty are within him, the poison whereof drinketh up his spirit." (Ps. xxxii. 4; Job vi. 4.) The man, toiling through the sandy waste under Africa's burning sun, soon is oppressed with languor and thirst—weariness, weakness, faintness succeed. And the parching drought consumes him, till the pulse beats feebly in his veins, the springs of life are fast drying up, and life seems ready to ebb away. But if his tottering steps can reach the fountain of cold flowing water, the very first draught will be to him as life from the dead. It will revive his impaired strength, send the current of life with fresh impulse through his exhausted frame, and make him remember his fatigue no more. Even such is the experience of the man that is opprest, faint, and hopeless through sin. Hearing the call, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely," lifting languid eye to the help thus pointed out, yet turning to it, he shall drink living water—water that will give life, and recall departing vigour to his perishing soul. "Out of the throne of God and the Lamb there proceedeth a pure river of water of life." Of this, to which no barrier hinders his approach, and which he needs to undertake no long journey to reach, of this drinking his soul shall live. And the water which he draws from this river shall be within him as "a well of water springing up to everlasting life."

And this is offered to him on terms which suit his need—*freely*. Freely, without money or price, is the gift of God to the sinner. Were there any price demanded, any amount of righteousness or faithfulness of service required to fit or entitle the sinner to partake of the fountain of life, he

must for ever remain under the effects of sin, and die the everlasting death to which it conducts. But God, who tells the sinner that he is "poor," as well as "miserable, and naked, and wretched," holds up to him all the blessings of his salvation, unpurchased as undeserved, and welcomes him to all their fulness. Freely he may receive. And God is most honoured, and the sinner most surely blessed, when he comes as destitute of every thing that can commend him to God, to acknowledge himself a debtor to free mercy alone, and to take as the fruit of God's most marvellous grace all the blessings of salvation, the joy and quickening of the water of life.

Such is the invitation addressed to the sinner—such the encouragement given him. The Spirit invites in every page of this blessed book, which was written by his inspiration, in the words of those who are set to proclaim the truths of that book, and in the testimony of the whole Church, which is "the temple of the Holy Ghost." The bride re-echoes the invitation. She tells the excellency and glory of him whom she loves. And constrained by deepest gratitude for his marvellous love towards her, and for all the blessings which that love hath conferred on her, she rejoices to declare his praise, and to call on unbelieving sinners to come in order to share in all the riches of his grace. And the invitation does not point out blessings, of which the attainment is desirable, but hopeless or even doubtful. The thirsty may come freely to drink and be satisfied. Whosoever will may come. No stern repulse need they fear. No harsh master is he with whom they have to do. He waits to be gracious. He delights in mercy. His joy is to open the treasures of his salvation to the perishing. Yea, "There is more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine just persons that need no repentance."

*How gracious an invitation is this!* What title had we to it? Just such title as insult and provocation could procure. God spared not the angels that sinned. This showed what holiness and justice demanded. But man, a mere puny, feeble creature, dared to rebel. And to him God addresses the invitation of the text. How gracious is our God! How full of grace his message to us!

*How precious an invitation is this!* How infinite the blessings to which it calls us! No one can tell their full worth. But their freeness, suitability, and fulness, proclaim how precious the invitation, which opens to us ready access to the complete enjoyment of them all.

*How absolutely necessary is it for us to attend to this invitation.* A gracious invitation we could not neglect without sin. Still, if we could be happy through neglecting it, our conduct would not expose us to reproach, so far as our own well-being was concerned. Our neglect of a

*precious* invitation would involve sin too. Yet less culpable might we appear, if we could secure our own happiness without the blessings which it sets before us. But let us despise this invitation and it cannot be well with us. There is then nothing but "a fearful looking for of judgment and of fiery indignation to consume the adversaries." We may not think so. But if we will not "come" at God's own call, and enter into friendship with him on his own invitation, we must remain on the terms of enmity with him which sin has produced—we must remain in the "city of destruction," over which the wrath of God hangs, and on which it shall speedily descend in terrific storm.

Now, my friends, the call is to you, and to you the encouragement is offered. To you the Spirit and the bride are now saying, "Come." To you every one that hears is commanded to say, "Come." On you, by every consideration of your need, by every desire you feel of good for time and eternity, by all the encouragements which the truth-loving and covenant-keeping God can give, is now urged obedience to the call. And shall all these be urged in vain? Will any of you, besought of the Lord and his servants, compassed about on all hands with entreaties to turn to the Lord, besought, too, for your own everlasting good—will any one reject the call, and refuse the invitation? O requite not so evilly the Saviour's grace, meet not with such madness the offer and assurance of gospel blessings; but come to the Lord while he calls upon you, turn to him while he is near. Hear his invitation, and plead his own promises with him. And then on you he will pour the full horn of his blessing. Though your sins were as scarlet, they shall be made white as wool. Recovered from the bondage of sin, and taken out of the number of God's enemies, you shall be joined to his friends, and admitted to a full participation of the peace and inheritance of the children of God. Come—"Come, for all things are ready." There is a sacrifice to take away your guilt—an availing Mediator to plead for you—a fountain in which to wash away your sin—grace to sanctify you, and kindness to raise you to the high estate of being, "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ." O come, then, "for all things are ready."

Not with less acceptableness should the invitation fall on the ears of those who have already turned to Christ. True, you have known that all things are ready, and that the Lord would have you to come to him. You have known the assurance of welcome provided, and of blessing secured. And you have come to experience the welcome, and to receive the blessing. But surely this, so far from making you heedless of the invitation, will just make you more eager to obey it. If you have tasted that the Lord is gracious, you will be the more attracted towards him. If you have felt the comfort and joy of the Saviour's love, you will the

more earnestly long again to experience them in all fulness, and to have that love again sealed to you. If you have had Bethel visits, when God confirmed his covenant of peace with you, ratified to you his exceeding great and precious promises, and admitted you to a participation of gospel blessings, so that you were "filled as with all the fulness of God," then will you the more joy to approach him again. And when the Spirit and the bride say, come; and when Christ, in whom there is enough and to spare, says, "Come, eat O friends, drink, yea drink abundantly, O beloved," will you not reply, "Behold, we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God;" we come unto thee, "For the Lord Jehovah is our strength and our song, he also is become our salvation."



## LECTURE IX.

BY THE REV. J. R. OMOND, MONZIE.

“ And it came to pass also on another Sabbath, that he entered into the synagogue and taught; and there was a man whose right hand was withered. And the Scribes and Pharisees watched him, whether he would heal on the Sabbath-day; that they might find an accusation against him. But he knew their thoughts, and said to the man which had the withered hand, Rise up, and stand forth in the midst; and he arose, and stood forth. Then said Jesus unto them, I will ask you one thing: is it lawful on the Sabbath-days to do good, or to do evil; to save life, or to destroy it? And looking round about upon them all, he said unto the man, Stretch forth thy hand, and he did so: and his hand was restored whole as the other. And they were filled with madness, and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus.”—LUKE vi. 6-11.

No attentive reader of the New Testament can have failed to perceive, that the Pharisees were the most determined opponents of our Lord's doctrine, and his most bitter and relentless enemies. His most severe and pointed rebukes were pronounced against them. They are never mentioned but to be condemned, and are held up always as a sect whose mistaken and perverse views were to be regarded by the disciples as beacons, serving to warn them of the errors into which all men must fall, who cease to follow, in simplicity and godly sincerity, the instructions given in the Scriptures. They are stigmatized by our Saviour as hypocrites, rejecters of the counsel of God—as serpents and vipers—as an evil and adulterous generation—and as painted sepulchres, which, though fair and pleasant when seen at a distance, are found, when more closely examined, to be the receptacles of that which is offensive and loathsome. His disciples were cautioned to let them alone, as they were but blind leaders of the blind. To beware of the leaven of the Pharisees was an advice and a command tendered more than once; and the reason why this character was given them we cannot fail to discover. We are told they made void the law of God by their vain traditions. Not contented with adding to what had been delivered to their forefathers, they contrived so to modify and explain away the law, that it could be made to bear any meaning which they chose to put upon it; and so daring had they become, that the plainest precept—as, honour thy father and thy mother—was by them set aside. They cared little how sinful they really were, provided only they could by any means as-

sume the appearance of great sanctity; and, forgetting that God looks to the heart, and that his language is, "My son, give me thy heart," they rested satisfied in the observance of a burdensome and ostentatious ritual. They were ever making additions to the letter of the law, and every addition so made was accompanied by a proportionate departure from its spirit; for the law, in all its parts, prefigured the sacrifice which Christ was to offer for the sins of the world; they forgot this, and, looking not beyond their own ceremonial, the more complex and multiform it became, the less did they care to understand what it foreshadowed. Neither can we fail to perceive why it was that they so hated the Lord Jesus. He not merely exposed to their followers their vain and hypocritical pretences, but he seems, by his pointed rebukes, to have satisfied themselves, that he had detected and saw through their pride; and they had every reason to fear that, through his instrumentality, their conduct, as seen in their long prayers and their public alms-givings, their extended phylacteries, and the borders of their garments when enlarged, would no longer be ascribed, as had hitherto been the case, to proper and praiseworthy motives, but would be universally recognised as the offspring of vanity and self-righteousness. Feeling thus towards the Saviour, and anxious to remove one whose influence with the people seemed increasing, and threatened to destroy their own, we find them, on various occasions—as in the instances recorded in Matthew chapter xxii, and in John, chapter viii, verses 1, 11—attempting to get the better of him by asking questions, which they vainly imagined he must answer in one of two ways, and in either way favourable to their purposes. Failing in this, they watched his conduct, hoping that they might in it find something whereof to accuse him; and when they thought they had found him deficient in the due observance of the laws of Moses, in charging him therewith, they gratified at once their desire to be avenged on him and their pride, by the contrast which they affected to draw between his and their own behaviour. In the text, we have the particulars of one of those instances recorded, in which the Pharisees acted in the manner described. Our Saviour entered into one of their synagogues and taught the people; among those present, there was a man with a withered hand, and, as the sacred historian goes on to relate—"and the Scribes and Pharisees watched him, whether he would heal on the Sabbath day, that they might find an accusation against him." From various facts stated by the Evangelists, it is apparent that many of the traditions of the elders—to observe which, in all their punctilious rigour, was a favourite injunction of the Pharisees on their followers—related to the keeping of the Sabbath; and when they discovered that the Lord disregarded these, they imagined that they had

found whereof to accuse him. Now this conduct of the Pharisees is not peculiar to them. Wicked men and hypocrites are at all times ready enough to lie in wait for the truly pious, and if they can find reason to blame them, they fail not to embrace the opportunity of doing so; whereas, if there really be no just cause of complaint, they are not slack to invent one. The Pharisees hated our Lord, not merely because of the opposition and exposure which they experienced from him, but also because, evil and given to this world, and alienated from purity and holiness, his conduct, when contrasted with their own, was a condemnation of theirs; and they hated him, too, because sinners always hate God, and those who resemble him. "If ye were of the world," says the Saviour to all his true disciples, "If ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but because ye are not of the world, therefore the world hateth you." In order to bring down upon themselves the dislike and reproach of those whose thoughts are turned away from God, and are given entirely to the things of time, it is not necessary that Christians should oppose the men of the world; the mere fact that they are not of the world is enough to call forth against them opposition and hatred, and, it may be, persecution. If, therefore, any of you who think yourselves Christians, have never experienced this opposition—if you are allowed to pass through life without encountering derision and contumely—see to it, and, by a careful examination of your own conduct, ascertain if the quiet which you are permitted to enjoy proceeds not rather from your failing at all times, and especially at the moment when opposition is most strong against you, to act up to your profession, than from any charge which the enemies of God and of all righteousness have undergone. It is not intended to be said, of course, that you should covet opposition; that were both superfluous and foolish; if you only act in the manner in which, as professing Christians, you are bound to act, you cannot avoid it; *for*, all that will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution. That persecution may assume, and actually does assume, a very different, and, blessed be God, a milder form now than it did in the days of the Apostles, but it is as active and as unavoidable now as then. Let it not, however, deter you from keeping the commandments, and walking agreeably to the ordinances of your Divine Master; let it rather be a motive, urging you to be watchful and circumspect in your walk and conversation, so that, when opposed, you may have the consolation of knowing that, had your Saviour been still on earth, and placed in circumstances similar to yours, he too, though holy and just, and most wise in all his ways, would also have been condemned, and that all the more severely, because in him all those graces and excellencies would have shone fully displayed—the faint re-

flection of which in you calls forth the opposition of a world lying in sin. In the days of his flesh, he was not deterred by the hard thoughts and unrighteous condemnation of men, from doing that which he knew to be right. When the Scribes and Pharisees, as we read in the text, watched him, he said to the man with the withered hand, "*rise up and stand forth in the midst.*" He had a work given him to do, and he proceeded to its accomplishment, notwithstanding all the malice of his enemies; and in this also let us imitate his example. When the path of duty is distinctly marked, let us keep by it, and not deviate into stray ways, nor delay discharging what is manifestly a present duty, because there are circumstances which may lead us to think that the self-same duty may be performed at a future period, without calling forth so much hostility. No one can fail to perceive that our Lord *might* have desisted from effecting a cure till the departure of the Pharisees had taken place; but, had he done so, the disciples, in all ages, and we among the number, might have lost the benefit of the great rule which he forthwith proceeds to lay down, and which we shall now consider. In the ninth verse, we read that Jesus said unto the Pharisees, "*I will ask you one thing, is it lawful on the Sabbath days to do good or to do evil? To save life or to destroy it?*" In these words there are several particulars requiring attention; and, first, as to the mere mode or manner of argument adopted by the Saviour—for he was here distinctly arguing with his opponents. We are to regard his question, "Is it lawful to do good?" as equivalent to the affirmation, it *is* lawful to do good—it *is* lawful to save life on the Sabbath day. And, farther, we learn from the question, that, when we have it in our power to benefit a fellow-creature, and fail to do so, we are not merely guilty of a neglect of the law of God, but we are guilty of an infraction of it; we are not merely not innocent, we are culpable; we are chargeable, not merely with failing to do that which is good, we are doing that which is positively evil. "To him," says the Apostle James, "To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin." And this is the principle involved in the question of the Saviour, in so far as the contrast which he virtually draws between doing good and doing evil is concerned. Still farther: the affirmation of our Lord implies, that while it *is* lawful to do certain actions on the Sabbath day, it is *not* lawful to do certain others. It is lawful to do good, to save life, but we are not at liberty to employ that day in the performance of actions whose tendency and object are not directly and positively to conduce to that end; much less are we, on that day, to do evil, or to destroy life. All this is contained in the words of our Saviour; for the argument which he adduces to prove that actions of one kind are to be performed, and that legally, proceeds

on the assumption that actions of another kind are not to be performed. The Pharisees do not seem, in reality, to have thought that the Saviour would, by performing an act of mercy, break the Sabbath; they sought merely to lay hold of his doing so as a pretence to blame him; and his open affirmation, couched as it is in the form of a question, and therefore requiring a reply, at once showed his acquaintance with their thoughts, and silenced them by its validity. They *could* not answer him, for they felt that he was right in asserting that it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath day; and they could not deny that, to restore strength to a withered limb, was doing good. The Sabbath day seems to have been the occasion on which many of the merciful works of our Lord were performed; and we too should, on that day, be ready to perform, and be more than ordinarily kind and attentive in the discharge of those acts of mercy which fall to be done on it. But, while we are careful not to neglect the performance of all those works which are properly defined in the Standards of our Church to be works of necessity and mercy, let us not forget that the Sabbath is not to be profaned by idleness, or doing that which in itself is sinful, or by unnecessary thoughts, words, or works about our worldly employments or recreations; but, on the contrary, is to be sanctified by a holy resting, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days, and is to be spent in the public and private exercises of God's worship. There is little danger now-a-days, if we may be allowed to predicate of what men's actions are likely to be, by the sentiments which are unfortunately too prevalent in many places, and which seem to be regarded as right in quarters where better and wiser opinions ought to prevail; there is little danger that men will neglect to do that which is necessary and merciful on the Sabbath day, merely *because* it is the Sabbath, however much they may be induced to neglect duties of the nature alluded to on other grounds. The tendency of public opinion now is, not merely that works of necessity and mercy may be performed, but that almost any work and every work may be executed on the Sabbath, provided only it be, in some way or other, different from the business of the other days of the week. The health of the body, we are gravely told, is to be consulted by recommending a change of employment, or even total abstinence from labour on one day in seven; but the health of the soul, its progress in holiness, and its growing aptitude for entering heaven, are regarded by many as matters vastly too trifling to be at all deserving of a thought. Men are to be admonished, it would appear, to adopt every means whereby the strength of the constitution is to be preserved and increased, but the preservation of the soul's health, and its increasing sanctification and purity, are no

longer to be deemed objects worthy of the consecration of a separate and distinct day. Now, these things ought not so to be. God who made man, and who knows what is in him, who knows his proneness to live by sight rather than by faith, to be contented with the fleeting vanities of time, forgetful all the while of the great and enduring realities of the world to come, has, in manifest wisdom to our weakness, commanded us to desist for one day in each week, from our ordinary occupations, and to keep that day holy, and to devote it to his service. By obeying this commandment, which the experience of every man who has made the attempt to do so, will tell him is a most gracious one, the continuity of our thoughts is broken in upon, leisure is afforded us to think, the Sabbath is a breathing time for the soul, on it the emotions which too often agitate, and the fears which too frequently harass the best and the wisest of men, are not unfrequently lulled asleep; and would we only be persuaded to employ that day, which our merciful and gracious Father has provided for us, as we might and ought, our souls would be refreshed and strengthened, and fitted all the sooner to enter on the enjoyment of that unending rest which remaineth for the people of God, and of which the rest of the Christian on the Sabbath of his Lord, is at once the foretaste and the type. We pause not to consider now the other advantages which flow from the observance of the Sabbath, but reminding you that we not merely are recommended, but are commanded, are called on, under the most solemn sanctions, to reverence it and keep it holy, we proceed with the remaining verses of the text.

Verse 10th, "*And, looking round upon them all, he said unto the man, stretch forth thine hand : and he did so, and his hand was restored whole as the other.*" In the parallel passage, as recorded by Mark in the third chapter of his gospel, we read that, before addressing the cripple, Jesus *looked round about them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts.* When we remember who our Saviour was, though in the form of man, yet very God, and therefore able to measure and gauge the misery and wretchedness of those who rejected the salvation which he brought, and read that on this occasion he grieved for them, we may, in a measure, be better able to form some conception of the fearful doom that awaits transgressors, by witnessing the effect thus produced by the contemplation of it on him. Will the stout-hearted among men be able to endure that punishment, to think of which as impending over them excited the compassion of the Saviour? Will they be able to witness unmoved the fierceness of that wrath, and to bear those woes which God Almighty has denounced against those who will not have him to rule over them, the prospect of which called forth such emotions in the holy human soul of Christ? It was a desire to save

men from the punishment which their iniquity so richly merited, that actuated the Saviour to suffer and to die for them ; and it was the sight of them madly bent on their own destruction which, on the occasion related in the text, as on other occasions, excited in him those feelings of compassion, which were not the less real, that we cannot enter into their depths nor conceive of their intensity. But in thinking of the wrath to be revealed, whether we regard it as a motive to stir us up to work out our own salvation, or as a reason why we should use every effort to tell the perishing sinners of this world that there is a Saviour, let us never forget, that the contemplation of that wrath called forth the compassion of him in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And let us not conceive amiss, as we are too apt to do, of the Redeemer's tears wept over lost souls. We are ready to think less of this sorrow than we ought to do, and *that* for this very palpable reason. When we hear a man lamenting and grieving because of misery which he has it in his power to relieve, but fails to do so, we at once conclude that his sorrow is not real ; and though few men, if any, would dare, in express terms, to say that Christ's sorrow was anything but real, still the thought will find harbouring in many a bosom ; he was God, very God, possessed of all power in heaven and on earth, and over the hard and obdurate hearts of sinners, and therefore he might, if he would, have saved them. Now, if we apply this reasoning to the conduct of men, it is unanswerable ; when they may relieve suffering and ward off misery, and do it not, their grief for that misery cannot be genuine—but God's ways are not as our ways, and his thoughts are not as our thoughts, and we are not to apply to his high and holy procedure the rules whereby we try the actions of our fellow-creatures. Christ, being God, might have saved all men, he might have softened and renewed the hearts of the Pharisees who watched him, as easily as he healed the withered arm, but he did it not. His compassion was excited when he saw their folly ; he was grieved for the hardness of their hearts, but are we, because that compassion did not prompt him to exert a divine influence for their conversion, are we to think the less of its reality and its depth ? No, and that just because he was God. Being God and not man, he might have put forth a saving energy—being God and not man, we are not to think amiss of his compassion, because he did not put it forth. And, oh then, when tempted to fall into iniquity yourselves, or to continue yet a little longer without drawing nigh to that fountain which has been opened for sin and for uncleanness—when wearied with the contradiction of sinners, and dispirited by their refusal to follow your advice and example, to betake themselves to the Saviour—when hard set by temptations on every side, and all but weighed down by the power of indwelling

corruption ; then think that the Saviour, who knew what was in store for the impenitent and rebellious, could not contemplate their doom without feelings of acutest compassion—could not witness them stretching out their hands against God, and strengthening themselves against the Almighty, and running upon the thick bosses of his buckler, without deepest sorrow and commiseration—think of this, and strive manfully as they who contend for a crown of glory, and resist the devil till he flee from you, and till victory be yours.

Another great lesson which we learn from the text is, the advantages derived from attendance on the public ordinances of religion. It was on the Sabbath day, and in the synagogue, that the Saviour met the man with the withered hand. It is probable that the same individual had seen the Lord on other occasions. He may even have witnessed the miraculous cures effected on others, but hitherto his limb had remained useless and inefficient ; on this day, however, he called forth the compassion of the great Physician, and his hand was restored whole unto him. Many, probably, can trace their first impressions of divine truth to what they heard in the house of God ; and all who have experienced a saving change at all, must be conscious of the benefits which have flowed to them from observing the command, not to neglect the assembling of themselves together. Where two or three are gathered together in Christ's name, he has promised to be in the midst of them, to bless them and to do them good ; and though he is not a God confined to places, or restricted to any particular ordinance in meeting those whom he has chosen to be his own, still it is his command that we come together to praise him for his wonderful love—to implore his forgiveness and his favour—to learn his will, and to take counsel with those who are walking towards Zion. And if, therefore, we heedlessly allow insufficient causes, or idle pretences, to detain us from his house, and the meeting of his people, we have no right to expect that he will send forth his light and his truth, to lead us as it were by force to his holy hill and to his tabernacle. On the contrary, there is every reason to fear that we shall be left still more to the guidance of our own wayward wills, and shall be permitted to wander still farther into the paths of error and iniquity. The experience of many will testify that they have sometimes entered the house of prayer dissipated and in sorrow, and have been enabled to go away rejoicing ; that when they came in perplexity and bewildered in doubts, God has been pleased to dissipate those doubts, and to shew them what is truth, and to enable them to adhere thereto. The Saviour of men, who entered their synagogues while he was yet a sojourner among them, and there instructed them in the knowledge of those things which pertain to the kingdom of God, still



meets his people while engaged in his worship, reveals himself to them, and fills their hearts with peace and love. And why will any deprive themselves of this unspeakable advantage? Is it because they undervalue the blessing? Is it because they are already sufficiently happy? Or is it not rather from a dread of really holding communion with the Father of their spirits, in the public services of the sanctuary, because they are conscious, that by so doing they would be brought nigh unto him in a manner which they have never yet experienced, and for which they have no relish; and if this be so, are they not pronouncing on their own conduct the most fearful sentence of condemnation?

Having, then, thus attempted to direct your attention to the circumstances attending the performance of the miracle related in the text, let us next, and very briefly, attend to the effect thereby produced on the Pharisees. In verse 11th, we read, that "*They were filled with madness, and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus.*" Maddened with the defeat which they had just sustained—silenced but not satisfied by the Saviour's reasoning, that to heal the poor sufferer was to do good, and was not therefore to break the law of the Sabbath—their rage knew no bounds, and they were tempted to consider how they could possibly remove one whose whole life was a condemnation of their vain and self-righteous pretensions. It is a common and just remark, that individuals who have had the benefit of early religious instruction, when they *do* overleap the barriers which education and their previous conduct have reared to preserve them from the contamination of vice, not unfrequently plunge deeper into guilt, and disgrace themselves by a more profligate course of life than do those persons who have never enjoyed the like advantages; and the reason is, that before they *can* get the better of their early impressions, they must undergo such a process of hardening, and must contrive, in some one way or other, to silence the reproaches of conscience so effectually, that this inward monitor seldom or ever interferes with their downward career thereafter. The greater the struggle is at first, the less probability is there that it will ever be renewed at a future period. And in like manner, when they who are brought into contact with men eminent for their piety and Christian attainments, persist in withstanding the influence of these, and continue to oppose them, they do such violence to their whole moral nature, that the evil which is in them is permitted to rage more furiously than ever. And thus it happened with the Pharisees in the days of our Lord's appearance among them. They would not imitate his example, and conform their conduct to his, all pure and peaceable and holy as it was. They saw the miracles which he did—they never dreamt of questioning

their reality, but, bent on their own wicked course, they resisted the force of the argument which was thus afforded, that he was indeed a teacher sent from God, and was therefore one whom they should reverence and obey. The lesson which their mad infatuation reads to us, is a very important one. It tells us not merely that *they* are unreasonable and perverse who say, that had they sufficient evidence that Christianity were indeed a revelation from heaven, they would then submit to its requirements; but it shews us also how deep-seated—how malignant is the sin of the human heart, which can prompt men at once to resist, and withstand, and seek to destroy their best friend. Let this consideration, the remembrance that there dwells in the bosom of each one of us by nature, such an hostility to God, and to that holiness without which no man shall see him—enhance, as it well may, our love to the Redeemer, who, by his sufferings and death, has purchased for his people victory over this foe, and has promised to give them eventually complete and entire deliverance from its pollution. And let those who have never yet fled unto Christ for refuge, consider how great their peril must be, seeing they carry about with them at all times, and that too forming a part of their very nature, a principle which, if not checked, and kept under, and subdued by the grace of God, will ever be acquiring more strength, and a greater ascendancy over them, and which completely unfits them for participating in the joys of heaven, and holding communion with God, he is above all .

## LECTURE X.

GLORYING IN THE CROSS OF CHRIST.

BY THE REV. JOHN PHILIP, FORDOUN.

“ But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.”—GALATIANS vi. 14.

THESE, my brethren, may appear to many of you to be high-sounding words, suitable enough as coming from the great Apostle of the Gentiles, but by no means expressive of the feelings entertained by the majority of Christians now-a-days. True, brethren, if under the appellation of Christians, you embrace all those who assume to themselves that name, or who make a profession of Christianity, these words will indeed find a response but in few hearts. Taking that term, however, in its original and proper acceptation, viz., as applicable to those who are indeed Christ's—his, not in name but in reality—we affirm that every Christian must of necessity be ready, in substance at least, to adopt the language of the Apostle as his own, and that the refusal or felt incompetency on the part of any to do so just proves that this name does not properly belong to them, that they are as yet Christless, and therefore without God and without hope in the world.

Brethren, how stands the matter with you? Does the language of the Apostle find a response in your breasts? Is it in *any* degree expressive of your feelings? Is there *one* chord of your hearts that vibrates in unison with it? Perhaps you will be better able to answer the above questions when once I have explained to you the meaning of the Apostle's language. In order to do this I shall *first* direct your attention to the cross of Christ as the subject of the Apostle's glorying; *secondly*, to the nature and description of his feelings towards that cross, as implied in the words, “ God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ;” and, *thirdly* and lastly, to some of the grounds of his glorying in the cross, and especially to the one which seems to be pointed at in the words, “ by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world;” or, as it might rather be rendered, by which, viz. by the cross, the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world.

I. Let us look for a very little to the expression, "the cross of Christ." This, my brethren, has different meanings in Scripture; sometimes it signifies simply the wooden cross to which our Saviour was nailed—the accursed tree on which he hung. This is its most simple and literal meaning. Sometimes, again, it is used in a figurative sense, to signify those sufferings which our Saviour endured on the cross—the death which he died on it. In a wider sense still, it is employed to designate the whole of his sufferings both of his life and death, of which sufferings his death was the consummation. Lastly, the expression is not unfrequently used to denote the doctrine of Christ's cross; in other words, the way of salvation through a crucified Saviour; and it is in this sense chiefly that we are to understand it in the verse before us. It was not, you will perceive, the sufferings of Christ considered in themselves that the Apostle gloried in; the consideration of these we believe cost him many a tear; but it was the end which these sufferings had answered—the opening up of a way for fallen man whereby he might return and find favour with God—the throwing down of the barrier which sin had erected between the holy God and the sinner—and the paving a channel for the free egress of God's mercy and love; in short, it was the grand doctrine of the Atonement—the great plan of salvation through a crucified Saviour, in all its exceeding length and breadth, in all its fulness, in all its parts; it was this that formed the subject of the Apostle's glorying.

II. Let us consider the nature and description of Paul's feelings towards the cross of Christ. "God forbid," he says, "that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." You all know, my brethren, what it is to glory in any object. It is just to have a very high esteem for it. For example, if we speak of a man glorying in his good name, his riches or his friends, we just mean that he esteems these things very highly, that he sets a great value upon them. The consequence is, that he thinks and talks continually about them, and nothing sooner excites his indignation than to hear them undervalued or dispraised. When Paul says, then, that he gloried in the cross of Christ, you are simply to understand him as meaning that he placed a high value upon it, that he prized it greatly. The consequence was, that that cross was the all-engrossing theme of his meditation, his conversation, and his preaching. Hence it was, that he determined to know nothing among the Corinthians, save Jesus Christ and him crucified. Hence it was that his epistles, which naturally took their colouring from his thoughts, were so much occupied with setting forth a crucified Saviour. Hence it was, that in all that he did and spoke, he was ever on his guard, lest the cross of Christ should be

made of none effect. Hence also it was that he felt so keenly when he saw that cross despised or lightly esteemed by others. "Many," he says, when writing to the Philippians, "many walk of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ."

Observe, however, more closely the nature of the Apostle's glorying, as described in the text: "God forbid that *I* should glory, *save in* the the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." This shews his glorying in the cross to have been an *exclusive* glorying. The cross not only appeared to him as an object worthy of esteem, but it appeared to him as the only such object. We often see men taken up with several objects at once. No doubt there cannot well be more than one object on which the mind is *supremely* set, but there may be others on which a considerable share of attention is at the same time bestowed, and for which a strong attachment is also conceived. But with Paul the cross was his all in all. It was so estimable an object in his eyes that he could not afford to waste one affection or one thought upon anything else. It filled his whole soul; it displaced and shut out every lesser object. Some of the Judaizing teachers among the Galatians, while professing Christianity, were yet glorying more in some of the institutions of the law, and in the proselytes they made, than in the grand doctrines of the cross; and Paul, with special reference to these, says in the text, "God forbid that *I* should glory, *save in* the cross." Do not suppose by this that Paul meant to undervalue the Mosaic institutions, or that he saw no excellency or glory in them. He appreciated them highly, and speaks of the ministration to which they belonged as a glorious ministration. But seeing that these institutions were appointed but as shadows of good things to come, and that the substance itself was now before his eyes, he determined to glory in that and in that only. Even that which was made glorious, he says in one passage, had no glory in this respect by reason of the glory that excelleth; for if that which is done away is glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious. The glory of the cross appeared to him so great as to eclipse every other object. Although, as the Scriptures say, there is one glory in the sun, and another glory in the moon, and another glory in the stars, for one star differeth from another star in glory; yet such is the superlative glory of the sun, that when once it has risen and attained its meridian splendour, all those lesser lights disappear. And so it was in the case of Paul; he saw a glory in all the former institutions of the law—in all those luminaries which shed such lustre upon the Old Testament church; but when the Sun of righteousness arose, and when on Calvary's cross that Sun attained its noon-tide splendour never more to set, then those luminaries disappeared, or became but as specks in the heavens.

But did Paul, you will perhaps say, glory in nothing but the cross of Christ? In nothing, my brethren, except so far as it was illustrated or irradiated by its glory. He gloried in his infirmities. "If I must needs glory" he says, "I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities." But the reason why he did so was, as he tells us, that the power of Christ might rest upon him. He rejoiced in his sufferings, but it was because in them he was filling up what was behind of the afflictions of Christ for his body's sake the Church. He rejoiced in tribulations; but it was because he felt that the greater the darkness and distress which surrounded him, the more sweetly and powerfully did the beams of his Saviour's glory pour in upon his soul. He likewise gloried in his converts; for when writing to the Thessalonians he says, "Ye are our glory and our joy;" but he did so because in them and all such, he saw the power of the cross of Christ illustriously displayed; because he saw in them the trophies of redeeming love. Thus you will find, my brethren, that everything in which the Apostle gloried, had a special reference to and bearing upon the cross; and that the attraction which any object did hold out to him, arose solely from the light which it borrowed from that source. We may well say, then, that his glorying was an exclusive glorying. Hear what he says in his epistle to the Philippians, "Doubtless, I count *all* things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of *all* things, and do count them but *dung* that I may win Christ."

What a mighty change was this which had come across the Apostle's feelings! Once he gloried in the zeal which he had displayed in persecuting the church; once he prided himself in the learning which he had acquired at the feet of Gamaliel; once he boasted of his blameless conduct, touching the righteousness of the law. Now all these things appeared to him not only as unworthy of being gloried in, but as constituting his greatest shame. The light which shone round about him on his way to Damascus, had revealed something to his soul which made the whole of his previous life wear an aspect of the most hideous character. That something, brethren, was none other than the cross of Christ. From that moment his views and feelings became completely altered. Instead of glorying any longer in his persecuting zeal, he now took pleasure in being persecuted himself, as he tells us, for Christ's sake; instead of vaunting himself on his superior attainments, he was content to become a fool, if so being he might attain to the knowledge of Christ; and instead of building himself up any longer in his own fancied righteousness, he hesitated not to style himself the chief of sinners. How apparent were all these feelings both in his life and conversation! His glorying in the cross

was everywhere conspicuous. Whether in the market place or in the synagogue—whether before the promiscuous assembly or the learned sanhedrim—before magistrates, princes, or kings—he shrunk not from confessing Christ or from preaching his gospel. “I am not ashamed,” he says, “of the gospel of Christ.” Wherever he went he carried with him the savour of Christ’s name. His eye, you would think, had continually been resting on Calvary’s cross.

Brethren, let me ask whether or not you are glorying in the cross of Christ? Does that cross appear to you an object worthy of your supreme regard? Does the plan of salvation through a crucified Saviour commend itself to you above every other? And have you renounced every other? Have you come out of yourselves and your own righteousness; and do you esteem that righteousness as but a filthy rag? Does the knowledge of Christ and of him crucified, possess a paramount excellency in your eyes, and would you rather possess that knowledge than all riches and honours? Are you ready to confess Christ before men, and do you rejoice when you find an opportunity of doing so? Do you confess him among your enemies as well as among your friends? Are you never ashamed of his cross, and do you esteem his reproach? Are these your feelings, brethren? or is this the direction in which they are all tending?

III. Let us now point out some of the grounds of the Apostle’s glorying, especially the one which is stated in the text. “By whom (or rather, by which) the world is crucified to me and I unto the world.” We might state to you, my friends, many grounds which the Apostle, in common with all believers, had for glorying in the cross of Christ. Notwithstanding the ignominy and shame usually attached to the death of the cross, there was something transcendentally glorious in the death of Christ. Never were the divine perfections so conspicuously displayed as in that event. Never was the love of God so signally manifested as when he bruised the son of his love. Never were his holiness and justice arrayed in such terrible majesty as when he gave forth the summons, “Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow.” Never was the mercy of God clothed in such attractive garb as when he laid upon Christ the iniquity of us all. Mercy and truth did indeed meet together, righteousness and peace embraced each other. Never, my friends, was the universe of God the witness of such a glorious scene as was enacted on Calvary’s cross. *There* did all the perfections and attributes of God meet, as if in one grand focus, in one harmonious concert. *There* was his holy and righteous law magnified and made honourable; *there* were its high claims satisfied. *There* was sin made an end of, and an everlasting righteousness brought in. *There* did

death receive its death ; *there* were the principalities and powers of hell spoiled. *There* were heaven and earth made friends ; *there*, at least, was the wall of separation between them broken down ; *there* an universal amnesty was proclaimed. Well, then, might the Apostle have gloried in the cross of Christ on these accounts, and we believe he did so glory. And we doubt not but he so glories still ; aye, glories with a transport and joy far greater than he could do upon earth, because now those mysteries of redemption are beheld by him, not through a glass darkly, but as it were with open face. But there were yet other reasons which might have led the Apostle to glory in the cross of Christ. The mighty changes which the preaching of that cross had produced, the wonderful effects which it had wrought on a dark and benighted world, might well have made him glory in its behalf. Was it not, my friends, a ground of glorying to see the most inveterate and deep-rooted enmity slain by it ? the most debasing lusts and passions eradicated by it ? the most abominable superstitions overthrown by it ? and the most lovely and attractive graces made to grow and flourish in their stead ? Was it not a glorious sight to see one citadel of Satan after another crunbling into ruins ? to see one after another of his wretched slaves emancipated from his yoke ? to see one after another of the poor, perishing sons of Adam made the sons of the living God ? Was it not a glorious sight to see the wilderness and solitary place made glad, and the desert rejoicing and blossoming as the rose ? to see the parched ground becoming a pool, and the thirsty land turned into springs of water ? Yet such were some of the effects of the preaching of the cross, and such, we believe, were some of the grounds why the Apostle gloried in that cross. Nay, we not only believe, but we know that on these grounds he did glory. "I am not ashamed," he says in his Epistle to the Romans, "of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." And you remember we heard him saying to his converts among the Thessalonians, "Ye are our glory and our joy." Also in the fifteenth chapter of Romans, when speaking of himself as the minister of the Gentiles, he says, "I have therefore whereof I may glory through Jesus Christ in those things which pertain to God." But while the Apostle thus gloried in the effects produced by the cross upon others, his glorying as mentioned in the text seems to have had especial reference to the effects it produced upon himself. "By which," he says, the world is crucified unto *me* and *I* unto the world." This language, brethren, is worthy of your most attentive consideration. Once the world was the Apostle's all ; once its gaudy pleasures, its tinselled joys, and its fawning friendships, were all his boast and glory. Now it appeared to him as a poor, empty, shrivelled, dying thing. Now its pleasures had be-



come tasteless and insipid ; its friendships cold and uninviting, yea utterly repulsive. Its favours no longer allured, and its hatred no longer terrified him. Now it possessed no more attractions in his eyes than *would* the countenance of a crucified person, blackened and distorted by the agonies of death, in the eyes of the surrounding spectators ; or, if it did yet retain any, the least hold of his affections, that hold was daily loosening and would soon be snapt asunder for ever. But what was it that produced such a change as this upon the aspect of the world to him ? It was just, my brethren, the cross of Christ. No sooner was it beheld by him than the world lost its charms. The light which shone from the cross at once revealed to him the true nature of all earthly things ; it shewed him a hideousness and ugliness in them that he had never discerned before. Many things you know appear smooth and beautiful in the dark, but once let in the light upon them, and they immediately wear a very different aspect. So it was in the case of Paul. He thought at one time that the world was all fair and lovely, because he viewed it through a thick and darkening medium, the vale of unbelief. But when that veil was taken away, and when the flood of light which streams from Calvary's cross was let in upon his soul, what a changed aspect did the once lovely scene begin to wear ? How many asperities then rose up to view ? how many filthy spots were then discerned ? how many receptacles of putrefaction were then laid open ? how many noxious vapours and exhalations were there seen rising up on every side ? It then appeared to him no better than a great charnel-house, a valley full of dead men's bones—a moral waste—a land of darkness, as darkness itself.

But this was not the only effect which the cross of Christ produced on him. It not only made the world dead to him, but him likewise dead to the world, “by which the world is crucified to me and I unto the world.” Not only did the world become changed to him, but he became changed towards it. Not only did *it* lose its charms, but *he* lost his desires after *it*. He now viewed its pleasures, its joys, its amusements, with as little relish and delight as a man hanging on a cross would view the richest delicacies and most inviting fruits that might be spread out before him. The current of his affections was completely changed, and the direction they had taken was just the very reverse of that in which they had formerly been flowing. We have told you, my brethren, the reason of such a change. It was no sickening disappointment that had chagrined his spirit ; it was no canker-worm that had been preying upon his heart ; it was no fitful dream that had come across his soul. It was just the very same cause that had made the world changed to him ; it was just the light that had flashed on his soul from the cross on Calvary. Ob-

serve, however, how that light operated in both cases. In the one case, viz. in the case of the world, it operated in producing the change by the disclosure which it made of its hitherto concealed but pregnant impurities; in the other, viz. in the case of the Apostle himself, it operated in producing the change by the disclosure which it made of something infinitely more glorious than all that the world could give; and that something, brethren, was none other than Christ himself. The light which shone from the cross answered both these ends. It not only disclosed the utter worthlessness of the world, but it also revealed the exceeding preciousness of Christ. And it was this latter sight that made Paul dead to the world. Even after an object on which we have long set our hearts has been discovered to be unworthy of our affections, we are loath to give it up until we have found something better. At the very same moment, however, that Paul became sensible of the utter hollowness of the world, his eye was directed to something which he saw to be infinitely better than it had ever appeared to be. No wonder, then, that from that moment his affections should have been alienated from the world; no wonder that he should have divorced it; no wonder that he should say, "I am crucified to the world."

You see then, my brethren, the effects which the cross of Christ produced upon the Apostle. We have yet, however, to enquire how it was that he gloried in the cross because of those effects; in other words, why did he glory in the cross of Christ, because by it "the world was crucified to him and he unto the world?" The answer to this enquiry may be stated in a single sentence. Paul longed to be like Christ, but at the same time he felt the world and his own corrupt heart to lie like insurmountable objects in the way; therefore he gloried in the cross because it crucified them both, and, as it were, took them out of the way. While the flesh lusted against the spirit, he could not do the things that he would. He could not soar aloft to the regions of purity and peace. He gloried then in the cross, because it crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts. While the old man lived and reigned within him, he felt as if he were sold under sin. He rejoiced, then, in the cross because it crucified this old man; knowing, as he himself says, that "our old man is crucified with Christ, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin, for he that is dead is freed from sin."

In short, my brethren, the Apostle gloried in the cross because of its sanctifying power. He longed to be holy, because it was thus, and thus only, that he could become like his Saviour; and he felt the cross to be a most powerful engine, powerful through the working of the Spirit, for the producing of holiness. He not only desired that he might be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, but that which is through

the faith of him, the righteousness which is of God by faith; but he also desired that he might know Christ, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable to his death. But thus conformable he could not be, so long as he was conformed unto this present evil world. He therefore gloried in the cross because it dissolved not only the attractions which the world presented to him, but also the love which he entertained for it; because it made the world dead to him and him dead to it. Oh the blessed effects which this death produced! "I am crucified with Christ," he says, "nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

Having now, dear brethren, endeavoured to give you an idea of the Apostle's feelings as described in the text, let me ask you, can you appropriate any of these feelings as your own? I already asked whether or not you could say with him that you gloried only in the cross of Christ; I have now to ask you whether that cross has produced on you the effects which it produced on him? Has it crucified the world to you and you to it? Does the world now appear to you a poor, worthless, dying thing? Has it lost the attractions it once possessed? Are its simpering joys now distasteful to you, its soothing flatteries now a burden to your soul? Has it lost alike the power to allure and to terrify you? Are you indifferent alike about its favour and its frown? Put your hand upon your heart and say whether or not this be indeed the case? Or is the world still your god—your all? Are you still worshipping its pleasures or its riches? Are you still paying court to its friendships, still revelling in its licentious joys? Is its music still pleasant to your ear, its sweets still agreeable to your taste? Brethren, remember they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts; they have escaped the corruptions that are in the world through lusts, "they are not of the world, even as Christ was not of the world." Again let me ask, have *you* been crucified to the world? Are you dead, or at least are you dying, daily dying to it? Does your heart no longer go out after its pleasures? Are you sick of its pomp and parade? Is your love for it eradicated, or at least is daily getting colder and colder? Brethren, remember "if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the Father but of the world." Remember the character of Christ's people. "They are dead" (*viz.* to the world), "and their life is hid with Christ in God." They have put off the old man and put on the new—they are renewed in the spirit of their minds. They are crucified with Christ.

I have but one other question to put to you. If you say you are glorying in the cross of Christ, what, I would ask, is the ground of your glorying? Are you glorying merely because that cross brings pardon and eternal life; because it delivers from wrath, because it raises to glory? Are these your only or your chief grounds of glorying in it? Or can you at the same time take up the ground on which the Apostle's glorying seems chiefly to have rested, and say that you glory in the cross of Christ because of the holiness which it brings? Do you long to be holy, to be like Christ? Do you long to shake off the body of sin? And do you glory in the cross because of its sin-destroying, its holiness-giving power? Believer, this we know is thy ground of rejoicing in it. Then gaze upon the cross and upon the bleeding Saviour. Drink in large measures of holiness, get ripening views of Christ. Oh the transforming power of the cross! It gives the death-blow to sin and to the world; it changes the believer from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

In conclusion, we have simply to say, that such glorying in the cross as we have been speaking of can never be separated from those effects which we said the cross produces. They go hand in hand together. Brethren, examine and see what is the ground of your glorying; see whether or not you can adopt the language of the Apostle, in substance at least, as your own, and say, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world." For if you cannot, you have too good reason to fear, as we remarked in setting out, that as yet you are without an interest in Christ, and therefore still in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity. Should this be your sad condition, may He who commanded the light to shine out of darkness shine into your hearts, to give you the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

## LECTURE XI.

GLIMPSES AND FORETASTES OF THE BETTER LAND.

BY THE REV. ISLAY BURNS, DUNDEE.

“ And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Send thou men, that they may search the land of Canaan, which I gave unto the children of Israel : of every tribe of their Fathers shall ye send a man, every one a ruler among them.”—NUMBERS xiii, 1, 2, &c., to the end of chapter.

THE children of Israel are now on the very confines of the promised land. Encamped at Kadesh-barnea, the last resting place in the desert, they are probably as near the country whither they are travelling as they possibly can be, without being actually within its bounds. Probably from the summits of the neighbouring hills they can already descry in the distance the vine-clad hills and shady valleys of “ the land flowing with milk and honey,” and can almost feel the fragrance of its spicy breezes wafted down into the desert. Their weary journeyings then seem well nigh done, and their hearts, wistfully following their eyes to the blue landscape before them, are already at home in the land of rest. Yet how far are they, after all, from the end of their pilgrimage ! How far have they yet to wander, how much to suffer, how much to learn, before they set foot on the wished for soil. Even from the confines of Canaan must they turn back to the desert, and not till nine and thirty summers and winters have passed over them, shall they step down at last into the dry bed of Jordan, and enter in and possess the land !

So is it, brethren, with the people of God in *their* eventful journey through grace to glory. At first—in the early days of fresh experience and warm first love—the believer shoots up like the palm tree, and in a little time seems almost ripe for glory. His joyful steps, “ like hinds’ feet,” carry him swiftly on, and before he has almost entered on the heavenly pilgrimage, he seems already on the very confines of Canaan. He breathes after heaven. He longs to be with Jesus. Heaven, though still future, seems already begun within him. His peace is as a river—his joy unspeakable and full of glory. The fountain of life eternal gushes up within his heart. It is a very Beulah of holy peace, and

love, and gladness, and the breezes of heaven are around him. He is already *almost* in glory!—Thus he fondly dreams—but, alas! it is but a dream. He is yet far from home. He is not “meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.” His experience, joyful and blessed as it is, is yet superficial, in many points deceitful and unreal. His faith, though ardent and sanguine, is as yet little tried. His joy, so exulting and so full, is yet sadly mixed up with presumption and vain fleshly feeling. His love, though warm, is selfish—joying in the Lord for his gifts, rather than for himself. The old man is yet strong within him. There are unfathomed depths of corruption within, of which he knows nothing. Self, that oldest and foulest idol, still lurks within, and has scarce as yet got one deadly wound. He has, thus, much to learn, much to suffer, and much to do, before he can overcome and be crowned. Hence he must go back to the wilderness again, and, like the redeemed flock in every age, pass “through great tribulation”—that, being refined by the furnace, and moulded and fashioned under Jehovah’s hand as a vessel of mercy, he may be found at last unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

Such is the general subject to which our attention is now called, in connection with the simple and touching narrative before us. It is an interesting and important passage in the experience of the saints, and of every gracious soul, and is well worthy of an attentive and prayerful consideration. May the great Shepherd himself direct us and lead us into all truth, while we thus try to trace out the footsteps of the flock, and to be followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

There are two leading topics which manifestly lie on the surface of the narrative, and to which accordingly we shall successively direct your attention. These are—1st, the *Search*; 2d, the *Retreat*.

I. *The Search*.—The story is simple, and is soon told. “And the Lord spake unto Moses saying, send thou men, that they may search the land of Canaan which I give unto the children of Israel; of every tribe of their fathers shall ye send a man, every one a ruler among them. And Moses, by the commandment of the Lord, sent them from the wilderness of Paran. And Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said, get you up this way southward, and go up into the mountain, and see the land what it is, and the people that dwell therein, whether they be strong or weak, few or many; and what the land is that they dwell in, whether it be good or bad, and what cities they be that they dwell in, whether in tents or in strongholds. Now the time was the time of the first ripe grapes. So they went up, and searched the land

from the wilderness of Zin unto Rehob, as men come from Hamath. And they ascended by the south, and came unto Hebron. And they came unto the brook of Eschol, and cut down from thence a branch with one cluster of grapes, and they bare it between two upon a staff; and they brought of the pomegranates and of the figs. And they returned after searching of the land after forty days." It is plain, then, from the above narrative, that the spies made a thorough search of the land of promise. They traversed it in all its extent, from north to south, and from east to west; and during a long survey of forty days, viewed that lovely and delightful land in all its length and breadth. This was of unspeakable importance. Not only was it necessary in reference to the immediate object they had in view—in enabling them intelligently and successfully to lay their plans for going up and possessing the land, had it been the Lord's will that they should then "enter into his rest;" but it was necessary, for another purpose of which they then knew nothing. It was the Lord's gracious plan thus to give the people a vivid idea of the glorious land itself, and thus prepare them for the toils and the conflicts that were yet before them. Hitherto their ideas of the promised Canaan had been but vague and shadowy. They knew it only by hearsay. They scarce really believed in its existence. It was a sweet vision, indeed, often in the thoughts, and very near the hearts of the faithful, but still but a vision, and it had often proved but a poor counterpoise to the real toils and sufferings they had to contend with. They felt as though they were leaving behind them *solid* comforts, and passing through "a great fight" of *real* privations and sufferings, in search of a heritage they knew not of—which existed to them as yet only in the fancy, and which seemed to them often as but a dream. How different must it have been with them *now*—now that, through the medium of their own messengers, they had, as with their own eyes, seen the far-off country—traversed its length and breadth, wandered amidst its shady hills and valleys, and slept beneath its stately palms! The whole land now was before their eyes and in their heart. It is now a living, blessed reality. They now know the country to which they are travelling. They have seen the heritage of which the Lord had said, "I will give it you;" and they have found that all his words were true.—True, they did not then enter. That unbelieving and rebellious race were not judged then meet to enter into his rest. But that far off sight was not in vain. That lovely vision, once seen, could never be forgotten again. Its image lived in them; and doubtless, when they returned again to the wild and desolate wilderness, their hearts would often recur to that goodly land which they had once almost entered; and in times of despondency and sorrow, during the long nine and thirty years of their restless wanderings, would

its glory and beauty rise in vision before them, and rouse them to new ardour and activity and perseverance, in pressing on through faith and patience to inherit the promises. But for this, we need scarcely doubt, that that carnal and unbelieving people, who, notwithstanding Jehovah's constant presence with them, and the still recent memory of his stupendous deliverances, so soon became "discouraged because of the way," would have soon lost all hope, and sunk into utter forgetfulness of the home and the hope set before them, long before the destined years of their pilgrimage had run their course.

Now, it is even thus that the Lord prepares his young disciples for the trials and difficulties of their wilderness journey. Their early days are usually a time of love. Their state is indeed *very* blessed. They have fairly escaped from Egypt, and bid that cursed land an eternal farewell. The sea is behind them—the sea of God's eternal wrath. Heaven is before them. With light and bounding step they begin their wilderness journey, singing by the way, "who shall separate us from the love of Christ." Nor does the road seem long. The journey is short and sweet between Egypt and Kadesh-barnea, and in a little while they are on the confines of Canaan. They have bright and transporting views of glory. The land that is yet a far off seems full in view. Resting on the blood and righteousness of the Lamb of God they have perfect peace. Their hearts are full of joy—their consciences broken, tender, watchful. The Holy Spirit, the earnest of the inheritance, witnesses with their spirits, and whispers sweetly of glory. Their sky is without a cloud, and the river of their peace flows unruffled on. All is calm and bright and blessed. The beloved one draws near and whispers, "Arise my love, my fair one, and come away, for lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in the land." Believer, do you not remember such a time?—long past it may be, but fresh and sweet to the memory still. It may have been at your first communion feast, when for the first time he brought you into the banquetting house, and his love to you was better than wine; or on some evening walk to Emmaus, when Jesus joined you by the way, and made your heart to burn within you; or when first you opened your heart to one like-minded with yourself, and you each told of all the Lord had done for your souls, and you prayed and wept together; or when, having been honoured to bear shame for your Master's name, and borne with untold agony the cutting look and biting scorn for his sake, you escaped at last to your closet, and poured out your bursting heart into your Father's bosom, and then and there experienced a peace you never knew before; or it



may have been in the chamber of sickness, the prison-house of pain and sorrow, when Jesus filled it with his glory and made it a palace. Such are indeed memorable days—days which once known are never to be forgotten again. After long years of faith and patience, they will remain in the believer's memory fresh and vivid as ever, and he will long for their return again. He often sighs,

Where is the blessedness I knew,  
When *first* I knew the Lord,  
Where is the soul-refreshing view  
Of Jesus and his word?

What peaceful hours I once enjoyed,  
How sweet their memory still,  
But they have left an aching void  
The world can never fill!

But what after all was the value of all this blessedness? What was the real character and design of that experience? Was you *really* holier and nearer heaven than you have ever been? Was sin then really dead, and the world beneath your feet? No! brethren. But you were just then setting out on your journey, and Jehovah brought you to Kadesh-barnea. And he gave you a glorious view of the promised land, and some heavy clustres of the living vine; not because you were ready for home, but that, knowing what that home is, you might never forget it, and that, with your soul filled with the blessed vision, you might press toward the mark, patiently bearing all the will of God, and joyfully passing even though it were through fire and water, so you might safely reach that "wealthy place" at last!

But these messengers?—these swift forerunners, who were as eyes to the pilgrim host in surveying the goodly land, and who brought the glad tidings down to their encampment in the wilderness—to what in the kingdom of God shall we liken *them*? Surely here the picture fails, for from that glorious land whither *we* are journeying, no traveller returns to tell what he hath seen. They enter in once into the holy place, and they go no more out for ever. And yet methinks we are not without our spies—swift couriers to explore the land, and maintain a quick intelligence with the world unseen. For "*faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen.*" It brings distant things near, and absent things present. It looks across the gulph of ages—it pierces the veil of eternity, and brings all heaven before our eyes. Its clear eye beholds the "King in his beauty, and the land that is yet afar off." Thus even while on the earth may the believer hold converse with heaven. Faith, hope, love, swift-winged desires and breathings after

glory—far darting glances of the soul, to which time and distance are nothing—these run on before and pass the bounds of time, while the weary pilgrim, struggling with the flesh, and with the weight of this vile body, lingers far behind. Nor do they return empty handed; but many a healing leaf do they bring from the tree of life, and many a clustre of the grapes of Eschol to refresh us by the way, and many a gracious message and token from the Lord. Dear believers, see in this the secret of the hidden life—of a holy and happy walk with God. Be much with Jesus in heart. Live within sight of eternity. Set your affections on things above. Refresh your fainting spirit, and invigorate your faith, your love, your hope with fresh surveys of the promised land, and by walking up and down on the hills of immortality. So shall your peace be as a river; you shall go on your way rejoicing; you shall mount with wings as eagles, you shall run and not be weary, you shall walk and not faint.

But let us now hasten on, in the *second* place, to consider briefly—

II. *The Retreat.*—The Israelites did not remain long on the confines of Canaan. We do not indeed know how long their stay at Kadesh-barnea was, but we have every reason to think it was very brief. In a little while they are in the midst of the wilderness again, with Canaan behind and the wild and desolate desert before them. The distant view—the messengers—the glad tidings—the grapes of Eschol—all are now among the things that were, and they wander once more “in the wilderness in a solitary way.” Such alternations—such strange reverses of state and circumstances were not uncommon in the history of Israel. Thus no sooner had they chanted their triumphal song of deliverance on the shore of the Red Sea, and scarce had the joyful sound died away on the bosom of the deep, and they turned from gazing on the dark abyss where their worst enemies lay buried, than their toils and their trials began. Their first step towards Canaan was a step into a howling desert. “Then Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea; and they went into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness and found no water.” So was it, too, at the rock of Horeb. The happy flock are resting in peace around the rock, and drinking with joy of the stream that gushed from its smitten side. A distant sound is heard—and a cloud appears on the horizon. An alarm, and a stir as of approaching danger runs through the camp. It is Amelek—Israel’s deadly enemy, that is coming on; and they must arise and fight as for their lives. So is it in the history and the experience of the redeemed in every age. Theirs is a chequered course—alternate cloud and sunshine—conflict and rest from beginning to end. The day that began in feasting may close in fighting. To-day

they are at Kadesh-barnea, within sight, and almost, as it seems, within a step of Canaan—to-morrow they are in the wilderness, amid dark mountains, and barren thirsty plains, as though their faces were towards Egypt and they had lost sight of their home for ever.

The particulars of this retrogressive movement, and of the long train of sufferings and of wanderings that followed, form the subject of the subsequent narrative, and do not properly fall within the scope of the present lecture; still we cannot consider the present happy and bright interval in the history, without noticing its speedy termination, and taking a look forward, and marking generally how it fared with the pilgrim band in that path of mingled judgment and mercy which succeeded it. In doing so we shall learn some further sweet lessons of the dealings of our God, and the experience of the redeemed in every age.

1st, Then, *the children of Israel were sent back to the wilderness on account of their sin.* They were found utterly unfit and unable to enter in and possess the land, from their faint-hearted cowardice and God-dishonouring unbelief. So is it with us. God has, doubtless, good and wise reasons for keeping us long in the wilderness, trying us with difficulties, and leading us through clouds and darkness, fire and water. He may even overrule our guilty backslidings, and melancholy declensions in grace for good, and make them all redound to his own glory at last. He may have work for us to do—he may have lessons for us to learn, which could be done and learned *only* in a world of tribulation and of sin; and, therefore, he may leave us struggling on with temptation and sorrow, long after we had obtained the title to the inheritance, and the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts. Great usefulness, doubtless, *may* be the reason of a long pilgrimage, and of a long and toilsome conflict, just as a faithful monarch may be loth to recall an illustrious and well-tryed veteran from the scene of conflict, and may leave him toiling and suffering in a distant field long after he had amply earned his crown, while all the time he remembers his faithful service, and longs to call him home to be with him where he is. So was it with John—so was it with Paul—so with other illustrious names in every age of the Church of God. But alas, brethren, is there not reason to believe that in the case of most of us, another and a far different reason must be given for a protracted and a weary pilgrimage. If *one*, like Caleb or Joshua, is sent back for greater usefulness, and as a reward of faithfulness, rather than a rebuke of sin, thousands more are kept back in judgment, because through unbelief “they could not enter in.” We were so carnal—we were so unready. Our hearts were so chained to the dust, and so little in unison with our high destiny. We were such slow learners in the school of Christ, that we had to be sent back again, and to a sterner school than

ever, that we might learn it over again. It is because we are unripe that we stand in the field so long, exposed to the scorching suns and bleaching rains of a long and chequered year of sorrow. "When the fruit is ripe, *immediately* he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come."

2d, *While the chosen people are sent back in judgment, they go back of their own accord.* Often the Lord afflicts and scourges his people, just by giving them their own desire. Thus a little while before this, when the people lusted after the luxuries and pleasures of Egypt, and would fain even then have sold their birth-right for a mess of pottage, the Lord in holy displeasure answered their prayer to their own heart's desire. Clouds of quails (a kind of food common, and much prized in Egypt) fell over all the plain round about the camp, and the people fell greedily on the unblest banquet, sent in anger, not in love. But while the flesh was in their mouths, the anger of the Lord was kindled, and the plague began. Thousands were swept away to an untimely grave; and the place, to commemorate the event of that fearful day, was called "the grave of lust." On the present occasion the people actually proposed to go back to Egypt again; and from a statement in another passage, we have reason to believe that they had already commenced their preparations, and even made choice of a Captain with that view. This melancholy retreat, then, with all that train of ills and sufferings that followed it, was their own guilty act—the device and the choice of their own carnal, grovelling, and unbelieving hearts. And, oh! brethren, is it not even so with us? Is not the same evil heart of unbelief in us all—departing still from the living God, and turning away from our rest? Are we not carnal, sensual, worldly? And when in holy judgment he sent us back to wander here as exiles still, and abandoned us, it may be, to a low, selfish, and unspiritual life—was he not granting us the very wish and device of our hearts? He brought us to Kadesh-barnea, and would have carried us by a short and rapid course to glory, but we could not—we *would* not enter in because of unbelief. Ah! let us never forget, that if we are low in grace, and far behind in the heavenly journey, it is our own sin and shame that we are so. We are lean, and faint, and unprofitable, and unhappy, because we desire to have it so. Yea, but for infinite mercy we had been infinitely worse. We would have gone back utterly and for ever to the land of death—*back unto perdition*—a thousand times, had not divine and sovereign grace kept us from falling, and given us to know the *bitterness* of backsliding, and not its deserved *doom*!

3d, *Though the fruit of sin, and the token of Jehovah's righteous displeasure, all was overruled for their good.* It was necessary that this

broken, degraded, faint-hearted race, just newly rescued from the withering yoke of iron despotism, and though now set free, retaining in great measure the hearts of slaves, should be sent back to the school of discipline, that, amid privation, toil, and conflict, they might acquire the spirit and the soul of freemen. God will not have these craven, crouching cowards, who, with necks set free, seem yet to wear the fetters on their hearts—fretting at the least privation—trembling at every danger—giving vent to ignoble and unmanly tears at the very naming of those enemies that stand between them and their rest—to enter into the glorious land. Besides, how much have they to learn of themselves and of their God—of his holiness, of his jealousy, of his faithfulness, of his grace, of his pure and spiritual worship, before they can be what he chose them for—a special people unto himself before all the nations of the earth. For this end were they sent back for thirty-nine long years to dwell in tents, and to wander from mountain to mountain, and from desert to desert, in the wide and pathless wilderness. It was their school, their gymnasium, where they were tutored and prepared for their high destiny. “He led them about, he *instructed* them.” True, of the multitude that were now sent back in dishonour to the wilderness, the great proportion *never* entered the promised land. Of those who had then reached the years of manhood, only Caleb and Joshua entered in. The rest whitened the desert with their bones—a melancholy and awful monument of the evil of unbelief. But *as a people* (and it is in this aspect that as a type we are to view them), they *did* outlive the period of their discipline, and come out of their great tribulation. They *did* pass the Jordan, and come to Zion with songs in God’s good time. Nor was their long and fiery trial in vain; for while the old race died gradually away, a new generation rose up better than their fathers, trained in God’s own school, and under God’s own eye, for the inheritance he had prepared for them; and we read, that when they did enter in, they did not dishonour their training, for “Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the Lord, which he had done for Israel.” Now, dear brethren, do *we* not need a similar discipline, a similar training? Ah! are we not carnal, unbelieving, unthankful, fretted by every petty trial, and dismayed by every difficulty, like this ungrateful and hard hearted people? Alas! though free, are we not still slaves in heart, crouching before a poor world’s frown, and trailing the heavy chain of carnality about with us? How little holy liberty—how little strength—how little boldness, in the omnipotent might of Jesus—how unlike we are to our high rank and glorious destiny! How little of the high bearing, and royal air of the

children of God!—that spirit, and that demeanour, and that life, which becomes the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty, and the expectants of an eternal weight of glory! Ah! is it not well that we *are* sent back into the cold and desolate world again, to humble us, to prove us, and know what is in our hearts; that while he prepares the inheritance for us, he will prepare us for the inheritance; and that he will never leave us, or withdraw us from the school of training, until he hath wrought in us a princely heart, and a princely bearing, worthy of the throne he is providing, and the crown he will put upon our heads?

4th, And finally,—*Though chastened and afflicted of the Lord, they are not cast off.* God never did cast off his people whom he foreknew. The Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel, and what he hath promised he will assuredly bring to pass. Individuals may be cast off—multitudes may be cast off, for all are not Israel that are of Israel; but as a people (and in this view alone are they a true type of the Church of God) they never shall. “Though troubled on every side, they are not distressed; they are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.” Four things still distinguish this sinful, afflicted, yet still beloved people, and mark them out before all the nations of the earth as a people near unto God, and loved with a faithful changeless love. 1. They are *divinely delivered*. Still from beginning to end the Lord “covers them all the day long,” and delivers them from the hand of the enemy. The same God who was with them in the sea, and chained up its raging billows with his own hand, till the last of the ransomed flock had passed over, was with them to the end—in the stern battle field, amid the dark mountains, and in the gloomy, thirsty desert. “He found him in a desert land and in the waste howling wilderness. He led him about; he instructed him; he kept him as the apple of his eye. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings, so the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange God with him.” 2. They were a *divinely sustained* people. Jehovah fed them as it were with his own hand. Every morning a hand unseen covered their table with heavenly bread, and like children they gathered round it, and received their food immediately from God. They had meat to eat which the world knew not of. What a picture this of the life of faith in every age! “Our life is hid with Christ in God.” We feed on “the hidden manna,” we drink life and peace out of the smitten rock of ages. “We all eat of the same spiritual meat, and we all drink of the same spiritual drink, for we drink of the Spiritual Rock which follows us, and that rock is Christ.” 3. They are a *divinely guided* people. “He took not away the pillar of cloud.” Though tedious and circuitous their wander-

ings, and beset from first to last with temptations, afflictions, sorrows, they are not by chance. Jehovah guides them with his eye. He directs every step. They move, they rest at his command. "He leadeth his people by the right way unto the city of habitation." How different with the man of this world! He may, indeed, for a while, travel on most cheerily over rich and flowery paths, but he travels on at random; "he knoweth not whither he goeth." His next step may be a step into hell! The believer's footsteps are ordered by the Lord, and are therefore safe and sure. "Thou who deliveredst my soul from death, will not thou deliver also my feet from falling, that I may walk before the Lord in the light of the living?" "Thou shalt lead me by thy counsel, and afterward receive me into glory." Finally, (4.) They are a *divinely chastened* people. Gracious chastisements are an invariable and infallible mark of grace. They are provided in the covenant, and they are sure to all the seed. "If *my children* forsake my law and go astray, then *will* I visit their transgressions with rods, and their iniquities with stripes." "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth *every son* whom he receiveth." This was eminently marked in the case of Israel from first to last; for what is their whole history, from the day they left Egypt, until they entered Canaan, but just one continued train of sin and chastisement following in sure succession, the one upon the other. And thus Jehovah put a mark upon his people, and distinguished them from all the nations of the earth. So is it ever with the people of God. The chastening rod, the hedge of thorns, the refining furnace, fiery darts of the enemy, frowns of Providence, and hidings of the Father's face, when his people forsake his law and go astray—these are essential features of the children of God, and as real a token of salvation as the showers of manna from heaven, or the heavy grapes of Eschol. Thus from first to last are the redeemed and chosen flock, by clear and infallible tokens, marked out before men and angels, as a peculiar people, a people saved by the Lord. The seal of the living God—the stamp of heaven is upon them. Everything about them—their experience, their history, their destiny are divine. They are divinely saved, divinely fed, divinely led, divinely chastened, and they shall be divinely glorified at last.

We shall now close these meditations by briefly noticing those practical inferences which the subject is fitted to impress.

1st, *Let young believers not be high minded but fear.* You may be now, so far as feelings and sensible enjoyments are concerned, on the very confines of Canaan, and yet far—very far from that holiness without which no man can see the Lord. These grapes of Eschol may just be given to prepare you for a long and dreary pilgrimage—to prevent you from sinking during those seasons of darkness and conflict that

may be before you. Many a fierce battle—many a fearful pang of anguish—many a dreadful hour of temptation, may yet await you, before you overcome and are crowned. Therefore be prepared. Rejoice with trembling. Calmly survey the whole way before you, and put on the whole armour of God. Be watchful, tender, prayerful. Keep close to Jeſus. “Pray that ye enter not into temptation.” One false step may lay you low, plunging you into the depths of darkness and misery, and piercing you through with many sorrows. You who are now on the borders of Canaan, with a clear sky above, and heavy gales from heaven, laden with the foretastes of glory breathing around you, may yet be wandering in a little while amid the gloomy mountains of Sinai, and by the dark shores of the Egyptian sea, mourning you first love gone, and calling to mind with many tears those days of holy peace and joy, and close walking with God, you once enjoyed, but cannot, alas! recall. A bright dawn is often soon overcast; and the sun that arose in glory, may travel on the livelong day through a chequered sky, and set in gloom, and amid clouds.

*2d, Let backsliders remember and weep.* Perhaps some of you are in the very case I have just described. You are not as you have been. To the warm fresh days of early experience, a cold and gloomy winter has succeeded, and your religion is in the sear and yellow leaf. You have “fallen by your iniquity.” Relapsing into old sins—sins of which you had seen the exceeding sinfulness, and experienced the bitterness, and which in the presence of a bleeding Saviour, and with many tears, you had renounced as if for ever—you entered on a course of fatal and deadly backsliding from which you have never recovered. You have become estranged to God, and cold and listless in his service. You have become weary in well-doing. Prayer has become a weariness and a burden. Your peace, too, is broken—the joy of God’s salvation gone. You are unsettled, restless, unhappy. The fountains of joy and health seem dried up within you. And you are going backward, not forward. Your heart grows harder—your love more cold and dead—sin gathers new strength—the world binds its fetters faster and faster round you. Your soul cleaveth unto the dust, and you become like unto them that go down into the pit! Alas! what a melancholy case. What a sad wreck of a soul, once so happy and so holy! What a triumph to the enemy and to a scoffing world! Melancholy that one who began so well, should fail so lamentably at last—that having begun in the Spirit, you should be made perfect in the flesh. Ah! you have, indeed, cause to weep—to weep over times of blessing past, days of grace wasted, opportunities for ever lost—your soul withered, languid, dead—an injured Father, a wounded Saviour, a grieved Spirit. Dear soul, will you not awake at last? Is it not



high time to awake out of sleep? Remember the times that are past, and think of the dreary wretched days you have spent since then, and say, are you to sleep on any longer? Was it not better with you then than now? What holy liberty! what strength! what joy! what mounting up as on eagle's wings! what victories! what tokens of the Lord's kindness! what usefulness! until that unhappy moment when, for the sake of some forsaken vanity, some unblessed companionship, some darling idol, you forsook your God. Oh! awake, repent, return! Forsake the evil thing, leave this far country, and return to the bosom of your God. Every thing calls to you, Awake—all within, all around. Your own soul's peace—christless friends around you, who gather courage from your drowsiness—Jehovah's cause, which is through you blasphemed—time passing, eternity pressing on, vows and promises broken and trampled under foot, a triumphing world, a weeping Saviour, all cry, "Awake, awake, thou that sleepest." Oh! are you to die in a cloud—are you to enter eternity in a dream, scarcely saved—almost lost?

Finally, *3d.*—*Let tried and troubled saints take fresh courage.* All darkness is not backsliding. All tears are not guilty tears. Indeed, we cannot grow in the knowledge of our own heart, and in the knowledge of Jesus, without having often cause to weep, and to walk in heaviness. Besides, the believer's feelings and experience in the different stages of the divine life are essentially and necessarily different. His very progress implies this. There is a dawning brightness, a vernal glow and freshness about the early days of grace, which *must* pass away, and can never be recalled again. This is not to be confounded with backsliding or declension in grace. The blade of spring, indeed, gradually loses its freshness, and its verdant loveliness passes away; but it is ripening, not withering; and, lovely as the budding verdure of spring is, the mellow glory of autumn is lovelier. So is it with ripening, as compared with early grace. Its impressions are less vivid, but they are more deep and abiding. Its feelings are less ardent, but they are calmer and holier. Its peace may not so overflow, but it ploughs a deeper channel. It is not so exulting and sanguine, but it is more solemn, more chastened, more lowly. There is less of the flesh, more of the spirit—less excitement, more grace. John, when, now laden with years and labours, he was carried into the congregation, and could only look round and smile, and say, "Little children, love one another," must have been much changed in feeling from what he was, when in the fire of his first love, he obtained the name of a "son of thunder;" and yet he was far liker Jesus, and far nearer glory. Therefore, beloved, be not cast down. Though feelings change, though comforts decline, though there be ups and downs, clouds and storms, as you travel on, still be of good courage, and hold

on your way. Rather rejoice, and bless the Lord that he that began the good work is carrying it on—that the long year of grace is gradually running its course—that the spring is already over, that the summer is pressing on, and that, amid changing suns and showers, storms and calms, you are ripening for the eternal harvest. Only seek to be holier, daily nearer the Lord, daily liker Jesus, and then all is well. Soon shall time give place to eternity. Soon shall sin, and sorrow, and change, end for ever. Soon shall the day break, and the shadows flee away.

Shall I end without one word to the unsaved—those who have no part nor lot in these things? I shall only add one sentence, addressed to such, which may the Eternal Spirit write as with a pen of fire on every heart, “If judgment must begin at the house of God, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?”

## LECTURE XII.

BY THE REV. DONALD FERGUSSON, LIVERPOOL.

## THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION.

“Ye are a chosen generation.”—1 PETER ii. 9.

THE Epistle from which our subject of discourse is taken, is addressed “to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.” (1 Peter i. 1.) These are supposed to have been Hebrews—the remnant of the captivities, partly, perhaps, the remains of the ten tribes abiding still in Assyria and in the neighbouring countries whither they had been transplanted by their Chaldean and Assyrian conquerors; and partly the remains of the two tribes who had not returned with Ezra and Nehemia, or who had subsequently been compelled to leave their own well-beloved land. Among these, Peter, the apostle of the circumcision, appears to have preached the gospel of Jesus, to which they had lent a willing ear; for the whole bearing of the Epistle proves, that, hearing the gospel, many of them had believed.

The discoveries recently made in the East, of the character, and habits, and faith of the Nestorian Christians, I may remark in passing, serve to throw a light most interesting, and, as appears to me, far from doubtful, on the address with which the Epistle opens; for if, as is now supposed by many, these Eastern Christians are the descendants of the lost tribes; and if, as their own traditions, and as concurring testimony say, they were converted to Christianity in the days of the Apostles—then do we find, in these mountain fastnesses of Central Asia, the descendants of those among whom Peter had most likely laboured, and to whom this Epistle was dedicated—preserving, in the midst of thick, surrounding darkness, the faith which the Apostle had proclaimed to them, when, in obedience to his Lord’s commands, he published the gospel message *first* to the seed of Jacob, the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Be this as it may, the Epistle bears internal evidence of being addressed to believers, who retained many of the Jewish habits and Mosaic predilections. Looking back upon the history of their race, they would remember, with swelling hearts, the honour which God had conferred on

their fathers, in selecting them from the surrounding families as a people on whom to set his love. They would recall the signal deliverances which God had wrought for them, the wondrous dealings which had attended them throughout their journeyings, and afterwards when they were established in Canaan; they would point to the law and the worship established by the especial command of God to be observed among them. "When," would they say, "did God deal so with any other people? when was another Abram called? when another Isaac covenanted with? when another Israel blessed? when did he cleave the sea and the rivers, to make a passage for any other people than this?" And, looking to these evidences of God's peculiar favour to them, as a family and as a people, they would be ready to imagine that, if they conformed to the religion of Jesus—so simple in its ritual, so general, yea, universal in its invitations—that they would lay down their high claims to that character of a "chosen," a separate, a "peculiar people;" and that, in the very act of avowing the Christian faith, they would strip themselves of the marks and privileges which distinguished them from the Gentiles, as a "holy nation," a people consecrated by God's choice, honoured by God's special favour, and devoted to God's service.

In this Epistle, and especially in the verse of which our text forms a part, the Apostle seeks to dissipate the mistaken views of those Jewish Christians, regarding their ancient privileges—to show to them that the distinctions and honours enjoyed by the Hebrews of old, were just a type and a foretaste of still richer honours and privileges that were to be conferred on the true, the spiritual Israel; that the former were only the shadow, the latter the substance; that throughout the whole history of the Jewish people, there was an analogy running between God's dealings with his ancient Israel and his dealings with the ransomed Church of Jesus; so that, in embracing Christ, and adopting his faith, they would be just reaping the full harvest of privileges and blessings, whereof the Jewish economy was nothing more than the seed time.

"Fear not, therefore, ye descendants of Abram," is the Apostle's argument; "Fear not, ye Jewish believers, that, in accepting Jesus, and cleaving to the cross, ye lose any of your privileges or your distinctions; fear not that ye will forfeit your right to be reckoned an elect, and a peculiar people. You are only confirming the fact more surely than ever, by assuming the badge of gospel discipleship, and professing the gospel faith; for all those who are Christians have been elected "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." (1 Peter i. 2.) So that of them it is specially true, that they are "a chosen generation."

I. *Our text exhibits the Church under a certain character.* She is represented as a *generation*. This expression conveys two ideas, and these diametrically opposed to each other. It conveys *an idea of separateness*, and it also implies *the existence of a union*; in both of these is it most instructively applicable to the character and the circumstances of the Church of Christ.

When you employ the word in our text, in reference to any class of your brethren in the world, you single out one particular section of individuals, and, distinguishing them from all that surround them, you direct special attention to that *generation*. They are a people having certain marks of separateness and distinctness about them, which, for the time being, and for certain specific objects, distinguish them from all others of the race. So was it with the Jewish nation. The seed of Abraham was emphatically *a generation* singled out from among all the nations of the earth—a *generation* characterized by privileges and by favours beyond all other people—a *generation* distinguished by duties, and discipline, and rules of faith and practice, in which they differ from all their neighbours—a *generation* which, scattered, and persecuted, and peeled, as to this very day it has been, stands forth boldly before the world, and avouches its peculiarity, and preserves the evidences of its separateness still. Now, herein is the Jewish Church a type of the believing Church of Jesus. Believing brethren, ye are especially *a generation*, a peculiar *generation*, separate from an unbelieving world around you, and distinguished by another faith, and another character, and other desires, than those which affect the carnal and the worldly. And Oh! let it never be forgotten that this forms one of the most marked characteristics of the believer. Ye cannot be united to Christ and the world, to sin and holiness, at the same time. “Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.” Ye cannot enjoy the world’s friendship and God’s friendship. If ye be Christ’s people, then must ye be a generation of men not of the world in your habits, in your feelings, in your language, in your desires, but practising the habits, and speaking the language, and cherishing the feelings of your Lord; ye must have such a savour of Christ about you, that men may take knowledge of you, that ye have been with him—that the believer may recognise you as a brother, and that the worldling may not count you as one of his fraternity—that they may see, that though in the world, ye are not of the world. Ye must be recognised just as a little colony of heirs of glory, that are left here for a brief space, in order that ye may ripen for the inheritance, and, by your example, reprove a world lying in wickedness. I wait not now to ask whether your profession be accompanied by any such evidence of your discipleship; whether your heart, and your conversation, and your

life, be such as to prove you of this generation, this separate people; whether, like Noah, ye are preachers of righteousness; or whether, while professing Christianity, ye are yet, in all your views and feelings, conformed to the world and the things that are in it. Oh, it is the worldliness of professors that puts the words of scorn into the mouth of the scoffer; it is the inconsistencies of the believer that give weight to the sneers of the infidel; it is the fact, that those who profess to have their treasure in heaven are yet so earthly in their feelings and objects. It is this fact that brings such discredit on Jesus and his faith. I cannot at present wait to apply this portion of the subject, but would urge you to apply it to your own souls in private, remembering that ye cannot be of this generation, this separate people, unless ye have something that distinguishes you from the ungodly world that is without.

So much for the idea of *separateness*, found in our text. I now proceed to remark that the expression also implies *the existence of a union, a close and endearing connexion*. If the expression indicate a state of separateness from those "that are without," equally and more strongly still does it imply unitedness and connection among the body constituting that generation specified in the text. Among the Jewish nation of old, there were certain great leading features of national character, which, while they distinguished them from the surrounding nations, at the same time proved their connection as members of one great community, observing the same laws, obeying the same government, distinguished by the same honours and privileges, and worshipping the same God. Bound by the same duties, and meeting in the same temple: their privileges, their religion, their solemnities were all *one*. They had also one and the same object. While sojourning in the wilderness, they together looked forward to one resting place; while entering into Canaan, they together laboured for the expulsion of the heathen; while dwelling in Canaan, they all prayed together for the establishment of the same kingdom; and even now, when scattered through the nations, they look with united eye for the same Messiah. They cherished the same hopes, and they do so still — the establishment of their generation under one king, of the line of David, who will rule over them, and make them an "eternal excellency, a joy of many generations."

Of old, they were united in character, in objects, in hopes; and chequered though their history has been—scattered as they are among the Gentile nations—you find this bond of union still continuing to this day.

And so is it with the people of Christ Jesus; though they are strangers, scattered throughout all lands, still are they a united people, mem-

bers of one great commonwealth, bound together by the same laws, cherishing the same feelings, practising the same habits, distinguished by the same privileges, and looking forward to the same glorious reward. They are as one great united body, whereof, if you touch one member, you affect the whole; just as, on the one hand, the human frame is thrilled throughout every nerve with one pleasurable sensation when one member is soothed; or as, on the other, a pang which assails one member affects the whole body; even so with the "generation that seek thy face, O God of Jacob." Their pains are one, and their pleasures also; and scattered and strangers though they be, although far separate from each other, yet one pulse, one heart, one sympathy pervades the whole; so that, when they meet, they feel themselves brethren. As when two travellers from the same neighbourhood, although in their own land they had known no intercourse, meeting on a foreign shore, are ready to embrace as brethren,—so with the believing people of Jesus, whenever they meet, they feel that they have one common Head, one common heart, one common object, one common joy.

They have *one common character*. They are united in their sentiments and sympathies. The natural man has been slain, the new man has been assumed. The world has become a wilderness; eternity is their home. Their conversation is not of earth, but of heaven. Their lives are not regulated by sense, but by faith. An atmosphere of heaven's holiness and of heaven's joy breathes around them; and Christ Jesus is inscribed on all they do, and think, and say. "They are living epistles of Christ Jesus," representing his feelings, and exhibiting his character, and publishing his will.

They have *one common object*. To honour Jesus, to walk with Jesus, to be like Jesus, to have no mind but his, no will but his, no righteousness but his, no strength but his, no joy but in his presence. They are crucified with Christ, and risen with him, having had their sins nailed to his cross, and leaving their corruptions buried in his grave; and their constant aim, day by day, is to be conformed to his likeness, so as to manifest his glory.

They have *one common hope*. There is a heaven of joy, and glory, and perfection, before them—a heaven where God's presence ever shineth—a heaven where the face of Jesus ever smileth—a heaven where there is no night of sorrow, no cloud of sin. This is their common home, whither they are journeying. Faith hath revealed its glories to them from afar. She has told of its purity, whispered of its peace, exalted its joy, and testified of its perfections. Already have the believer's hopes sought to lay hold of these joys by anticipation;

and when this privileged generation hath beheld such glories in store, is it wonderful that, with one common heart, they should turn their backs on the world and their faces Zionward? Is it wonderful that, with united desires, they should press forward through Jesus as the door, and by Jesus as the way—facing perils, surmounting difficulties, triumphing over adversaries, fighting their way onward through all the opposition that lieth in their path, to that glorious resting-place, where this generation, assembled in one bright company, shall join in one song of triumph, and enjoy one eternal repose?

Such is the generation that is separated from the world, and united first to Christ, and through him to each other. Their hearts are ever beating in unison; their desires and affections, hopes and fears, are flowing from the same source, and in the same channel. True it is, that while in the world they are not the same, in so far as their advancement in grace is concerned. Some are babes, others are youths; others strong in the faith. Some there are “walking without being weary,” having little joy, yet pushing on. Some there are, “who run without being faint,” who have more comfort and more confidence, and whose advancing progress is more speedy. Some there are who “mount up on wings as eagles,” with eyes that never blench, and with pinions that never weary. There is a difference in degree, but none in kind. The same faith animates every heart—the same love glows in every bosom—and the same hopes are kindled in every soul; although they are not seen in equal strength and perfectness, yet are they there the same in nature, and the same in object. Just as in the midnight sky, though one star differeth from another in brightness, yet the qualities of the light in all are the same, and all are combining for the purpose of relieving the gloom of the night; so with the believing people of God; they are not equally advanced in the divine life, but the nature that animates them all is the same; all are stars in the firmament of the church, though all are not stars of equal brilliancy, and all combine in one object, “to make their lights so shine before men, that others seeing their good works, may glorify their Father which is in heaven.” The one great object which the meanest as well as the mightiest believer is desirous of advancing, is the glory of Christ.

Thus does the whole church of Jesus form a united generation, with one nature, with one object, and one desire; connected into one harmonious whole, for the purpose of honouring the Lord in their union; and it matters not how diverse the gifts and graces of the different believers may be if they are Christ's—these gifts and graces, although differing from one another, will be found to unite and harmonize, for the purpose of attaining one great common end. As you have seen metals



different in their qualities, when melted in the crucible, mingling their qualities together, and so forming a composition more useful than any of the metals in their original state—thus the different characters, and qualities, and gifts, and graces of believing men, are melted and fused together by the warmth of the love of Jesus, so as to form one united, one harmonious generation.

Such, then, is the union between Christ's people—a union of hearts ; their affections, desires, objects, and hopes, are all the same, and therefore do the people of God present, or at least they ought to present, to the world, a society whose hearts are bound by love one to another.

Alas, why is it not so ? Of old the heathen, when looking on the Christian Church, were wont to say, " See how these Christians love one another ! " And what is the reason that the case is different now ? One reason is to be found in the universality of the profession. Many there are in the visible church who are mere professors, and these cannot love the true believer, nor can any believer feel towards them the love of Christian brotherhood. Truly there is much to lament and to confess of unbrotherliness among those who call themselves Christ's people. Brethren, judge yourselves. The Apostle gives you a balance wherein to weigh yourselves. See whether you can say, " we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. "

There is one other element of weighty import implied in this expression, to which I will do little more than allude. When you speak of a *generation*, you always combine with it the idea of a *family*, a body of individuals having a common father, and united together by the ties of a blood relationship. Such was the case with the Jews of old. They were all descended from one common stock—they were all one united family of the seed of Abraham. Believers in Christ, ye have got a nobler descent. Yours is a more glorious Father—yours a more illustrious family ! *Ye are God's begotten ones*. He is not your Father by creation alone—neither is he your Father by providence alone. These privileges you have in common with unregenerate men—with all the creatures of his hand ; but ye are his children by grace ; in Christ Jesus have ye been begotten again, by the Spirit of God, unto righteousness and true holiness. This is the grand secret of *your separation from the world, of your union as a church*, that the Holy Ghost has begotten a new nature within you, separating you from all that your former old and carnal nature loved, and uniting you to Jesus, and by Jesus unto all that is holy, all that is pure, all that is heavenly. Believers, ye are one *with* Christ Jesus—members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones—partakers of his nature, animated by his Spirit. Ye are

one *in* Christ; the same heart throbs through the whole mystical body—the same holy desires and affections animate it—the whole family are united in him, and consequently they are united the one to the other. One is your Father, even God in Christ Jesus through the Holy Spirit; and all they are brethren. All the living church is one great family, animated by a family spirit, adorned by a family likeness, and hasting on to the family home.

Is not this a glorious privilege? Is it a glorious thing to speak, and to hear of such a state, and to meditate on such a dignity? Oh yes, but it is a far more glorious thing to be a partaker of the privileges themselves! Ah! many think that the speaking, and the hearing, and the hoping, are enough! Brethren, deceive not yourselves—of this *generation* ye are not, unless ye are begotten again of the Holy Spirit—of this *family* ye are not, unless ye are born again, “not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

Know ye not, brethren, that unless the saving change have taken place upon you, ye are of another generation—another and a very different family—that ye are of your father the devil? Know ye not, that by nature ye are of him begotten—animated by his spirit, bearing his name, loving his children, doing his work. And if ye have not been converted, this is your condition still. Have ye been converted? Does any one say I do not know? I ask, have you ever inquired? Have you ever questioned yourselves thus: “Am I separated from the world? Am I in love with holiness? Do I love God? Do I long after Jesus? Do I cherish his people? Do I reflect his image? Do I press forward after him to his heaven? Such alone have a right to consider themselves that “chosen generation,” of whom God says, “I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”

II. Let us now inquire into the reasons why this generation have attained to such a character as that which I have endeavoured to describe. They are *chosen to it*. “Ye are a chosen generation.” It is all God’s work there is none of it your own. Long, indeed, it would have been, ere you had chosen aught so pure, aught so precious, aught so soul-satisfying, as the portion of the believer. *God has chosen this generation for himself*. Believing brethren, ye were chosen, and how?

1. *In the exercise of Divine Sovereignty*. The foundation of all genuine religion is to believe that we are all created for advancing the Divine glory; and that Jehovah in himself has sovereign authority to dispose of all, or any of his creatures, according to his sovereign pleasure, for the advancement of that object; and the submissiveness

becoming the lowly creature in God's presence should express itself thus, "Lord, glorify thyself in me according to thy will. I am ready as thy creature to fulfil thy pleasure."

And in the exercise of his own sovereignty did Jehovah choose a generation for himself, when all had rebelled against him. He saw the whole earth accursed—the whole race doomed to perdition—the whole universe arrayed in rebellion; and in his sovereign pleasure he passed the rebel archangels by, reserving them under chains of darkness for ever. He passed myriads of the guilty race of Adam by, dooming them to eat the fruit of their own ways, and to be filled with their own devices. He passed by, and seeing the guilty lying in their blood, he layeth his hand on one here and another there, "one of a city and two of a family," and saith unto them, *Live*. Thus he chooseth of his own sovereign will, from no claim, from no charm, from no intercession, from no importunity, but he saith, *I will that ye be saved—I will that ye escape the fire—I will that ye reach heaven—I will that ye have life everlasting—I will have mercy on whom I will; and whom I will I quicken.*

Jehovah, therefore, elects those as trophies of his sovereign authority—carried off out of a rebellious world; and who is there who will say unto him, what doest thou? or who will dare to assert that he hath assumed an authority or exercised a prerogative that is not his due and his right? The sovereignty of God, his absolute propriety in, and his absolute authority over his creatures, is a doctrine too little appreciated, and practically too little believed. Brethren, ye will never be happy until ye recognise God's hand in all things that he doeth—until ye see God working in everything that occurs—and until ye are ready to say, he doeth all things well. Oh! it may be often hard to bear his dealings—it may be often difficult to understand his movements—it may be often long before ye see his end from his beginnings; but ye will never be happy until ye are able to see the hand of a sovereign in it all, and amid darkness, and clouds, and fears, and pains, to say, "Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in thy sight."

And while ye, believing brethren, who have experienced the benefits of sovereign grace, should adore and praise this exercise of his sovereignty in electing your souls, remember that ye were—

2. *Chosen in the exercise of Divine justice and holiness.* "He is holy in all his ways, and righteous in all his works," is the language of the believing heart; but, saith the carnal man, "How can God pass over one and save another, when all are equally guilty?" And who art thou, O worm of the dust, that wouldst call the Sovereign of the universe to thy bar? Would he not be just in condemning thee? Was

not the sin thine own voluntary act, and is not damnation thy fitting doom? Has he doomed thee to one pang more than thou meritedst?

Is it not true that all are guilty and condemned, and would it not be just in Jehovah to allow all to perish? Would he not be a just God in casting all the apostates of Adam's seed into hell for ever? So did he to the apostate angels, and where was the injustice? So will he do with impenitent men; and even the souls in perdition dare not say that their doom is other than just. Can it be unjust in him to allow *some* to endure the doom which *all* have deserved. Or can it be unjust in him (if so be his sovereign pleasure) to save *some* from the perdition which their sin has deserved. Was it unjust in him to save from falling, by his preventing grace, the angels that kept their first estate; whilst at the same time he left the fallen angels to perish? Was it unjust in him to choose Abraham and his seed to such high honours of old, while the whole remaining world was left in darkness? Assuredly not—where *all* have deserved death it could not be injustice to choose *some* to life eternal.

See how it is in your ordinary dealings. If, from among a thousand traitors who have forfeited their lives to the laws of their country, it be the pleasure of the king to extend his clemency and a free pardon to a few, does this commit any injustice towards those that have to bear the fury of the law that they have outraged. If, of two debtors, who, for the debt that they owe, have been committed to prison, you forgive one his debt, while you leave the other still liable for what he owes, does he that is unrelieved have any reason to complain? No—the prerogative that is exercised belongs to the man who employs it. As little can any sinner charge Jehovah with injustice in passing guilty souls by, leaving them to eat the fruit of their own ways, while he washes and saves souls as guilty as they, thereby proving his own sovereign propriety in his creatures. Oh! let every mouth be stopped that would arraign the divine justice; in such an instance let us rather see divine justice and divine mercy harmonizing, the one in ransoming souls from death, and the other in condemning guilty and unbelieving souls for their iniquities, thereby proving Jehovah's righteous authority in judging and condemning the breakers of His law before the wide universe: and seeing this, let us join with the Apostle and say, "Hath not the potter power over the clay; of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour and another into dishonour."

In one event, however, God might have been reckoned unjust in this electing decree. Had he passed over sin without vengeance, it might have been so; had he passed an act of indemnity, a simple pardon to the elected

sinner, without an atonement, then would God have been unjust, not, however, *towards men, but towards his own holiness, his own righteousness, his own truth and law.*

The elected could not be saved without their sins being punished and the law of God avenged. The electing decree, therefore, ordained the means as well as the end. The souls of the elected were chosen *in Christ*. He is their covenant head in grace, as Adam represented the race in the first covenant; and as Adam broke the covenant, and in the one act made himself and all his seed covenant breakers, even so, as Christ fulfilled the law, all his seed are reckoned in him as covenant fulfillers. As the first brought sin upon his seed, so the second brought righteousness as an inheritance to his offspring; as the first brought death into the world, and all our woe, so the second brought life and immortality to light; as the first Adam brought the curse and lost the blessing, so the second bore the curse and regained the blessing?

In Jesus, then, did the decree ordain, that sin should be punished and judgment executed—in him was the law to be honoured, and the insulted holiness of God vindicated; and therefore is he the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world—*judicially* offered in covenant—*virtually* offered when the first promise brought the balm of hope to the guilty heart—*typically* offered in all the sacrifices of the Old Testament economy—*actually* offered on the cross of Calvary. And when he thus assumed our griefs, and carried our sorrows—when he bowed his head, and died for sin, the justice of God was more honoured, and became more illustrious, than if every soul of man had perished everlastingly.

Look at this work and rejoice. See justice sheathing his sword in Immanuel's bosom—the law visiting his holy soul with her curse—the wrath of Jehovah smiting him; look on all this, and give thanks at the remembrance of God's holiness; give thanks at the vindication of God's law; smile even in the face of justice, and say, "My God is a holy, as well as a loving God;" and when you see justice arming himself against unelected and unbelieving sinners, hide ye in Christ, and say, "Behold, O God, my shield."

But, more than all the other attributes exercised in the electing decree—

3. *The love of God is manifested in all its richness.* This act of election, on the part of God, is usually, in plan and purpose, ascribed to God the Father; but this arises solely from the fact, that the initial step in the execution of the decree is the work of the Father. Equally is the act of election the deed of the Son, and of the Spirit, as it is the act of the Father. All the persons of the Godhead were at one and the same time enacting, ordaining, concurring in, and consenting to the act—exer-

cising their *independent* functions as three divine persons, and their *united* functions as one divine essence ; and each has proved his own independent share in the electing work, in the part which he has taken in its execution ; for while the Father has given his Son, the Son has given his life, and the Spirit devotes himself to the work of arresting, and converting, and sanctifying the souls and hearts of those that are ordained in the counsels of eternity to life everlasting.

Already have we seen the sovereignty of God manifested in this act, and we have also seen God's justice and holiness therein revealed. Behold now an attribute more tender, more affecting still, even his own sovereign victorious love, exhibited in this act of election—his sovereign grace in choosing, his victorious grace in executing. This is the theme of the believer's praise—the source of the believer's joy—the tender tie that binds him more lovingly to his Lord. When surveying all that he was, and all that he is, and all that he hopes to be, well may the believer say, "By the *grace of God*, I am what I am ;" "I got not the land in possession by my own sword, neither did my own arm save me ; but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto me." Oh ! brethren, it was all of love—of free grace on God's part, and no work on ours—of compassion in his heart, and no merit in our souls—of sovereign grace vouchsafed without a claim, which we could plead with him.

God *chose you*, believers ! Ye had *no claim on him*—ye had fallen from your holiness—fallen when it was in your power to have resisted temptation—ye had sinned, and therefore could ye have no claim on Jehovah. Yes, one claim ye had, ye had a claim on his judgment—on his fury—on his wrath—a full title to his hell. Ah ! brethren, if the unjustified soul were to open his lips, and to claim from God his due, what would he say—what would he ask ? What, but wrath—what, but ruin—what, but the floods of his hot anger ? This was our only claim, O sinners, at God's hands ; but such were not his sovereign purposes towards you, believers. Oh ! no. They were purposes of love—in love he chose you to the enjoyment of his love. *God chose you, not because of anything that was in you.* How could he ? Ye had nothing but what was filthy, loathsome, and hateful—all the race was corrupted—all the person was polluted—all, all was defiled. There was not from head to heel a spot that was not filthy ; and then did the grace come—grace, how precious, how marvellous to souls so very lost !

God chose you not, believers, *because of works to be wrought in or by you.* No ; *it was to this* that ye were elected, to bring forth fruit unto God. This is the object and the end, but never the occasion. As soon may you tell me that it is the light of morning that

kindles the sun's blaze in the sky, as that the works wrought in the believer by the Spirit, are the occasions of his salvation. No, brethren, here it is electing grace again, for the veriest reprobate now in hell, had God seen it meet to choose him, would have been as precious a vessel of mercy in God's hands as the brightest soul in glory.

*God chose you not, believers, because of the works to be wrought by Immanuel in your stead.* From all eternity God loved and chose the elect. It was this love that was the occasion of the covenant, and not the covenant that occasioned the love—it was the love of God that sent the Son, and not the achievements of the Son that begat the love. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, *and sent his Son* to save our lost souls. Oh, that our souls were now lost in wonder—lost in the heights and depths of this matchless love of God, who thus from all eternity did choose a people for himself, ordaining them in Christ into life everlasting.

Believing brethren, ye have all reason to adore this love—ye have all grounds for knowing something of it. The work is all grace. It is grace in the decree—it is grace in the execution of the decree—therefore, let grace have all the praise. Brethren and sinners, did you ever seek, or choose, or follow after God, when in carnality? “Ye have not chosen me,” saith Jesus, “but I have chosen you, and ordained you.” It is all of sovereign grace—grace in electing—grace in converting—grace in issuing the decree, and grace in executing it. Here is an open heaven—here is a free forgiveness—here is a full salvation, yet, believing brethren, did ye not pass them a thousand times by, and scorn and reject them, until the grace of God opened your eyes, and ears, and hearts, to adore the wonders of electing grace, and of redeeming love.

And now let no one say the decree is past. What then need I do? If I am elected, I am safe. God will accomplish his decree, and I may leave it in his own hands! If I am not elected, all my labours are unavailing, my soul is lost! Brethren, God has ordained the means along with the end; the end is hidden, your eye cannot see it, your heart cannot be affected by what is unseen and unknown; the fact of a decree existing never can affect your movements. But the means you do see; He telleth you to employ them, and to the means employed he promises a blessing.

What then, sinner, is it to thee, that behind the veil which shrouds the secret counsels of Jehovah, there is a record of the redeemed? What is this to thee now? or how can it affect thee? Thine are the means, and with the means, if you employ them, thine also is a promise that hath never been broken—the promise of a faithful God that he will bless the means.

Employ the same argument in the ordinary dealings of life. God has decreed the length of your days ; your hours are numbered. Will ye say that it is needless to provide food and raiment for your bodies because of this decree of God, leaving God to provide, without an effort of your own ?

The merchant sends his vessels to the ocean, although the issue of the voyage is from eternity decided. He ventures his treasures—he ventures his life, although he knows not but that his gallant ship may founder under the first blast that pours into her sails.

Brethren, let no man argue thus. What is God's message ? Here is a proffered salvation, freely proffered without money or without price. Here are the means provided whereby to find your way to salvation ! Here is the blessing promised to all who use the means, and who seek the salvation ; and if ye reject the invitation—if ye neglect the means, is God to be blamed for your obstinacy ; nay, rather, is your damnation not of your own choosing ?

Oh brethren ! in all its features, electing grace is to be praised ; even the condemned can bring no accusation against it, for it threw no bar, no hindrance in their way. And every redeemed one must rejoice in it, confessing that, if electing grace had not chosen him, he had never chosen God ; and that, if supporting grace had not upheld him, he had never reached to the salvation of his soul.

And now let me put the practical question to one and all of you, and oh press it solemnly on your own hearts, “ Are ye a chosen generation ? ” Let no one reply, How can we tell ? Brethren, what are ye chosen to ? Is it to heaven ? Yes ; but not first ; ye are first chosen to holiness ; and without this holiness wrought in you, never shall you reach heaven. I therefore ask you again, “ *Are ye a chosen generation ?* ” Have ye been chosen to holiness ? If not, the decree of election can yet speak no comfort to you.

Are ye a chosen generation ? Have ye received Jesus as your soul's salvation ? Oh, if so, remember that they who are Christ's have crucified the flesh. Now, what have you done to prove this ? What passion have you curbed ? What lust crucified ?—what darling sacrificed ? Search your own hearts and see ; and if ye find something to comfort, ye will also find much to humble you—much sin yet requiring to be cast out—much corruption yet to be crucified—all stimulating you to greater earnestness after the experience of the comforts and of the duties whereof the Apostle speaketh when he saith, “ The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal ; the Lord knoweth them that are his ; and let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.”



## LECTURE XIII.

NONE LIKE CHRIST.

BY THE REV. THOMAS WATERS, LAUDER.

"I am the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valleys. As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters. As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste."—Song ii. 1-4.

HUMAN language, even moulded by inspiration, completely fails to describe the matchless excellencies of the Lord Jesus Christ. Hence, the Holy Spirit, to remedy in some measure this deficiency of language, employs many sweet and striking images to shadow forth the glory and the grace, the loveliness and the love of him who is the Son of the Highest, and the Saviour of man. In this sacred allegorical song, which more than the breath of genius inspired, and which Solomon must have written with a pen dipt in the dews of heaven, and a soul baptized with divine love; such figures and images abound—some taken from the exercise of pure and conjugal love, some from the simple scenes of pastoral life, some from the objects of nature around us—the plant of rarest value, the flower of loveliest hue, the tree with nourishing fruit, and refreshing shade.

In alluring men to the Saviour, the Spirit of God manifests the most marvellous wisdom and love. For, *first*, As the souls of men are by nature enmity against Christ, before they can delight in his person, or rest on his work, a power divine must be put forth upon them; but this power often moves so gently, and with such nice adaptation to the condition of man, and is veiled beneath such a variety of attractive figures and illustrations, that the sinner, while drawn by Almighty grace, is as it were charmed by the beauty of a flower, or allured by the fragrance of a rose. "I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys." And, *second*, As when man was first created, he was placed in a garden, where were trees the most beautiful, and birds of sweetest note on every branch, and flowers that filled all Eden with delightful perfumes; and while the curse has in some measure withered and wasted the face of nature, there remains enough of beauty on many a fair landscape and lovely flower, to shew the glory of man's state, when, amid the beauties of the primeval paradise, he held converse with his God; and, as in the Bible, our views are carried forward to a paradise gained, far more rich and glorious than the paradise lost, where the full enjoyment of divine love and blessed-

ness is represented by such images as trees whose foliage never fades, and waving palms, and flowers that never wither :—Therefore, as man's primeval state of bliss with God in Eden, and man's consummated state of felicity with God in heaven, are associated and entwined with such images and emblems as these, behold the grace, and wisdom, and condescension of Jesus, in alluring sinners unto him, as he comes to them, with love in his heart and grace on his lips, saying,

Verse 1st, "I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys."

1. Notice, that this song is in the form of a dialogue, the principal parties in which are a bride and bridegroom, or Christ and the believer. Now it is Christ, and not the believer, as some think, who speaks in this verse. For in this song the believer never commends himself, but Christ. "Let another praise thee, and not thine own lips." Secondly, the connection between these words and the second verse, in which Christ, beyond all doubt, is the speaker, seems to intimate that they also are spoken by him. And especially, in the third place, the first verse can be spoken with propriety only by Christ. It is only he who says, "I am the true vine;" "I am the bread of life;" "I am the bright and morning star," who can properly say, "I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys."

2. Attend now to the import of the imagery here employed. (1.) "I am the rose of Sharon." The land of Canaan, as being the place where "God manifest in the flesh" was to dwell, and as a country of richest fertility and greatest beauty, is styled "the glory of all lands." In this land are several plains called Sharon; one of the finest of which is fifteen miles long, and thirty broad, bounded on the one side by the blue waters of the Levant, and on the other by the hill country of Judea. It is famous for its roses, which are universally admired for their rich fragrance and great beauty; as well as much sought after for a delightful perfume, called "the attar of roses." The prophet Isaiah, foretelling the marvellous change which the gospel would produce, says, "The desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing; the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon." Hence, as shadowing forth his glory, Christ says, "I am the rose of Sharon." (2.) "The lily of the valleys." The "valleys" seems to be a common name given in the Bible to open fertile plains in the Holy Land. In all probability there were places called "the valleys" near Sharon; for we read, "And over the herds that fed in Sharon, was Shitrai the Sharonite; and over the herds that were in the valleys, was Shaphat the son of Adlai." Now these rich pastures were full of roses and lilies of the finest kind. The lily was much esteemed among the Jews; and was employed to ornament almost every part of the temple

and its furniture. "He made a molten sea, and the brim thereof was wrought like the brim of a cup, with flowers of lilies."

The most magnificent flower of this kind was of a snowy whiteness, of lofty stature, and of a very delicate and elegant form. They must have been of surpassing beauty, of which Christ, pointing no doubt to some near him, said, "Solomon in all his glory is not arrayed like one of these." Speaking of this lily, an eye-witness says, "The flower was sweet scented, and its smell, though much more powerful, resembled that of the lily of the valley. This superb plant excited the admiration of the whole party; and it brought immediately to my recollection the beautiful comparison used on a particular occasion by our Saviour: "Yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." The beauty and rich expressiveness of these emblems, will appear still more palpable as we proceed to—

3. Trace some points of resemblance between them and Christ. And while we dwell on this, may the Holy Ghost, as a Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ, take of the things of Christ, and shew them unto us, so that we may see their beauty, taste their sweetness, and feel their power!

(1.) The rose and the lily have a *fragrant smell*. How pleasant the odours that are exhaled from these flowers, in the "incense breathing morn," when, bathed in dew, their sweet scents float around us, and fill the air! How regaling to the senses—how refreshing to the body! But Jesus transcends them all in the sweet fragrance that breathes around him, and refreshes and delights the soul.

"Is he a Rose? Not Sharon yields  
Such fragraney in all her fields,  
Or if the Lily he assume  
The valleys bless the rich perfume."

Everything about Christ is fragrant, and has a delightful odour to his people. "Unto you therefore which believe he is precious." His name is fragrant; it is "as ointment *poured forth*." His words are fragrant; "his lips like lilies drop sweet smelling myrrh." Those words are spirit and life; yea, "*the savour of life unto life*." It is the great business of the Christian minister to draw souls to Jesus, by "making manifest the savour of his knowledge in every place." His garments are fragrant; "they smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia:"—his ordinances are fragrant; they are "beds of spices:"—his house is fragrant; it is "the mountain of myrrh, and the hill of frankincense:"—his people are fragrant; "the smell of their garments is like the smell of Labanon." This fragrance of Jesus enters the soul, and refreshes it with the balm and the bliss of heaven's own peace; and throughout eternity will fill the redeemed with "joy unspeakable and full of glory." Christ is the lily—Christ is the rose—

"Whose holy fragranee fills the sky  
With balm of peace eternally."

Now, do you know anything of this fragrance—the fragrance of his *name*? Then you will not only follow him, but *run* after him in the obedience of a love that will never flag and never fail. “Thy name is as ointment poured forth; draw me, we will run after thee.” Of his *garments*? Such will be your experience of his presence, that you will say, “Lo this is our God, we have waited for him.” Of his *words*? Then they will be sweet unto your taste as the honey that droppeth from the comb; and you will “count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ.” Of his *ordinances*? This will be the language of your heart and life, “I was glad when they said unto me, let us go up to the house of the Lord.” “I will get me to the mountain of myrrh.” Of his *people*? You will regard them as “the excellent in whom is all your delight.” In a word, if you have taken Jesus in the arms of faith, and to the bosom of love, there will be such a sweet moral fragrance on all your words and actions, that men will “take knowledge of you, that you have been with Jesus.”

(2.) They are *very beautiful*. How lovely that rose—how beautiful that lily, fit to adorn an angel’s breast, or wreath a seraph’s brow! But Jesus is more beautiful far. “He is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand—his countenance is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars, yea, he is altogether lovely.” An angel is very beautiful—no stain on his snow-white robes—no shade on his sun-bright brow. Glorified spirits are very beautiful, attracting the admiring gaze of all heaven; “What are these which are arrayed in white robes?” A saint on earth is very beautiful, “all glorious within,” and “comely without;” but it is Christ, and Christ alone, in whom “*all fulness*” of beauty dwells. Beautiful is that sky lighted up with the rosy dawn of morn, lovely is that flower-garden lading with its thousand odours the passing breeze; beautiful is that firmament sparkling with stars; but Christ is “more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey.” He was beautiful in his childhood; “the beauties of holiness” shone with a mild lustre on “the child Jesus,” as “he grew up before Jehovah as a tender plant.” He was beautiful in his manhood; “grace was poured into his lips”—“the law of God was in his heart,” and “holiness to the Lord” was inscribed upon him every day; he was “holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.” The beauty of perfect, sinless manhood, and the beauty of perfect Godhead met, and mingled upon him who was thus “altogether lovely.” This beauty of Jesus will attract all eyes, and ravish all hearts, and enchain all souls throughout eternity; and as the redeemed and the unfallen gaze upon it, with lowlier adoration will they cast their crowns at his feet, and in loftier strains sing, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain.”

We do not ask what you know about divine truth or Bible doctrines,

but, Have you seen this beauty of Jesus? The promise is, "Thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty." Press forward to the high privilege with this desire in your hearts, "We would see Jesus," remembering that the religion which is of any value is not merely the knowledge of truths, and doctrines, and divine things, but *the knowledge of a divine person*, and an experience whose language is, "How great is his goodness, how great is his beauty."

(3.) Every excellence that is in Christ, is in him pre-eminently and perfectly. "In all things he has the pre-eminence." He is not only the sun, but "the sun of righteousness;" he is not only a star, but "the morning star;" he is not only balm, but "the balm of Gilead;" he is not only a rose and a lily, but "the rose of *Sharon* and the lily of the *valleys*." No name like his; it is above every name on earth and above every name in heaven! No righteousness like his; it is like "the waves of the sea!" No riches like his; they are "unsearchable!" No peace like his; it "passeth understanding!" No love like his; it is without a height and without a depth, without a length and without a breadth! Talk you of wisdom? "in him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Of power? "he is the power of God;" his very weakness is stronger than man. Of fulness? "all fulness dwells in him." Of glory? "he is the brightness of the Father's glory," and in our nature "he is crowned with glory and honour." Of the Spirit? he is "anointed with the Spirit above his fellows." Of beauty? "he is fairer than the children of men."

(4.) This rose and lily grow in the open plain, and may be plucked by any hand. It mattered not whether it was a Jew or a Samaritan, a Pharisee or a Sadducee, a rich man or a poor man, that walked through Sharon, and the lily covered valleys, he might pluck those roses and gather those lilies as he pleased. Christ is not far away in an unknown country, or far up in yonder heavens, to which Gabriel's mighty wing alone can clear its way; but he is down in this world, in a place as free and accessible to all, as that where Sharon's roses bloomed, and the lilies of the field grew; yea, in the low valley of God's free gift, and in the open plain of God's wondrous love. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." And just as he went to heaven he said, "Lo I am with you alway;" and even after he was there, "he sent and signified" by "his servant John," "Behold I stand at the door and knock, if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him and sup with him, and he with me."

Verse 2, "As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters." In the first verse Christ speaks of himself; in this second verse he speaks of the believer. Here are two comparisons—one between a

lily and thorns, another between a beloved and daughters. Let us open up each of them.

1. Between a lily and a thorn. "As the lily among thorns." In this comparison we have what Christ thinks of unconverted men, and what he thinks of the believer. It matters not very much what our friends think of us, it matters still less what an ungodly world think of us; it matters least of all what the devil thinks of us; but that which especially concerns me is what Christ thinks of me. Now, in the eyes of Christ the unconverted are as "thorns," the believer "as a lily."

(1.) Unconverted men are as thorns. Thus in Micah, "The best of them is as a brier; the most upright is sharper than a thorn hedge." Again, "all of them are as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands." Unconverted men may be called and compared to thorns; because first, *They are unfruitful*. "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" God denounces the curse of unfruitfulness upon Israel by the same figure; "the thorn and the thistle shall come up on their altars." Unbelievers bring forth no fruit unto God; they bring forth "the fruit of sin unto death," not the fruit of righteousness unto life. Second, Thorns are *pricking and grievous things*. Of the promised blessings to the house of Israel this is one—"There shall be no more a pricking brier unto the house of Israel, nor any grieving thorn of all that are round them." Unconverted men disturb and annoy the people of God; all that live godly in this life will suffer persecution. The same day that God cursed the ground saying, "thorns and thistles shall it bring forth," he said, "I will put enmity between thy seed and her seed." Ever since, the seed of the serpent has hated the seed of the woman. Third, Thorns *hinder other things from growing*. The seed that fell among thorns was choked and did not grow up. Hence this command, "Break up our fallow ground; sow not among thorns." So the world, temptations, ungodly men, and false brethren, hinder the shootings of grace and the growth of holiness. Finally, Thorns soon become *quite useless, and are fit only for burning*. "As thorns cut up shall they be burned in the fire." "But that which beareth thorns and briars is rejected and is nigh into cursing, whose end is to be burned." All Christless souls are thorns, whose end is to be burned in the quenchless flames of hell. "Who would set the briars and thorns against me in battle? I would go through them, I would burn them together."

(2.) The believer is a lily. First, The believer is a lily because he is like Christ, who is "the lily of the valleys." He is not only Christ's spouse by marriage, but his sister by likeness. "A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse." He is changed in his state and changed in his nature, so that he who saw him once as a prickly, unfruitful thorn, now

looking on him, says, "Thou art all fair, my love, there is no spot in thee." All this beauty and loveliness come from Christ, who is the head and husband, and elder brother of his people. Second, The believer is a lily among thorns, because there are few believers and many ungodly. "We are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness." The world is one wide waste of thorns—here and there a lonely lily. The flock of Christ has ever been a "little flock." And the broad way is still crowded by the many, while the narrow way is trod by the few. Third, The believer is a lily among thorns, because he is generally in an afflicted, persecuted state. "All who live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." These thorns are the "much tribulation through which we must enter the kingdom." This began in Adam's family. Abel was a lily, Cain was a pricking thorn. Noah was a lily among thorns; they grew on every side of him. So was Lot, so was Abraham, so were the children of Israel in Egypt, in Canaan also;—"I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides." Christ himself was a lily among thorns; he lived among thorns, he was crowned with thorns; and down the whole history of the church you will ever find the lively, uncompromising believer, a lily among thorns. But ere long the wilderness below is changed for the paradise above—the cross for the crown—the thorn for the throne. We simply ask the solemn question, Are you a thorn growing wild in the wilderness of this world? Or are you a lily planted in the garden of the Lord?

2. The second comparison is between a beloved and daughters. "So is my love among the daughters." Now, it is very plain that "the lily" in the first clause of the verse, is the same as "my love" in the second clause; and the "thorns" of the first clause the same as "the daughters" in the second. Therefore, "thorns" and "daughters" must signify the same persons. But let us open up this a little. In the Bible we read especially of two mothers—*Eve* the mother of all living, and *the Church* the mother of all professors. In the Hebrew language it is common to call the inhabitants of a country the daughters thereof, as for example, the daughters of Tyre, of Edom, of Babylon. Now, as all men and women are the daughters of mankind, so all professors are the daughters of the Church. But as Eve brought forth a Cain and an Abel, so in the church there are *wheat* and *tares*. Of these daughters some are lilies, more are thorns; some are real Christians, more Christians only in name. These "mother's children" have an external profession, but no internal beauty. Hence, as the lily among thorns, so is the believer, being "exceeding beautiful," among such daughters—such carnal professors. "The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour."—As there are none in the eyes of Christ so excellent as the believer—a lily

among thorns—a beloved among daughters, so none are like Christ in the eyes of the believer, who says in—

Verse 3, “As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.”

1. Now, we ask you to take note first of all, of the general scope of this verse in connection with the preceding one. In that verse Christ had commended the believer as a lily among thorns, in the midst of trials and troubles and wicked men, and so lonely withal—a solitary lily in a wilderness of thorns, a dove among vultures, a lamb among wolves. But he is not dismayed nor downcast; for he turns from *himself* to *Jesus*—looks away from what he is, to what Christ is. A lily among thorns he feels himself to be; but he has seen an apple tree, beneath which he has found such refreshing shade and fruit so sweet to his taste, that his is a delight such as he never knew before. This apple tree is Christ. “As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons.”

2. Here Christ is called an apple tree. Once and again in the Bible he is compared to a *tree*. In the Epistle to the Church of Ephesus, he is called “the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God.” In the closing chapter of Revelation, we read that John saw “the tree of life which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month, and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.” But here Christ is not simply called a tree, but a tree among the trees of the wood. It is a comparison which is made; and is meant to point out the superlative excellence of Jesus. “As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons.” In all that wood there is no tree so excellent as the apple tree. So in all that universe, and among all the sons of God, there are none like Christ; none like him in greatness and glory, in beauty and loveliness. Verily he is “one among a thousand.” Among *the angels*—the “sons of God” in heaven, there are none like him. He has “a more excellent name than they,” for “to which of the angels said God at any time, Sit at my right hand.” *The saints*—the sons of God on earth, are very excellent; but Christ is more excellent far than they; all their grace, and glory, and beauty come from him. “Not any tree in the garden of God is like unto him in his beauty.” Among *the sons of Adam* there are many great men and mighty—“Cedars in Lebanon with fair branches”—(Ez. xxxii. 3.)—but Christ is “fairer than the children of men;” he is “higher than the Kings of the earth,” for on his head are *many crowns*,” and on his vesture this name is written, “King of kings, and Lord of lords.” But Christ is to the believer as the apple tree among the trees of the wood, the most precious and excellent of all, especially because of—



3. His shadow and fruit, and the experience he has had how sweet and pleasant they are. Let us attend, then, to the shadow of this apple tree—sitting down under it—its fruit.

(1.) *The Shadow of Christ.* “I sat under his shadow.” This figure is frequently employed in Scripture. “Thou hast been a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat.” “A man shall be as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.” Generally speaking, the shadow of Christ means the protection of Christ—the protection of his special providence, and the protection of his special grace. But the term shadow points more especially to *protection from heat*; like Jonah’s gourd, which God prepared, “that it might be a shadow over his head.” Here notice, *in the first place*, That the shadow of Christ protects from the heat of outward trials and afflictions. Hence you find David singing, “Thou art my hiding-place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance.” Again, “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress.” The sword of persecution may be unsheathed against the people of God—the fires of martyrdom may be kindled around them—the hand of violence may be laid upon them—afflictions, personal and relative, dark as death’s shadow, may settle down upon them; but, in the midst of all this, they rejoice in the truth, that “The Lord reigneth;” or, as Luther was wont to say, “They lie becalmed on the bosom of their God;” and there they sing, as in the days of youth, “Yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast.” However high the waves may roll, however loud the tempest may roar, as they sit beneath the shade of this tree, they hear a voice saying, “Fear not, for I am with thee.” Beneath this shadow, Christ “makes his flock to rest at noon,” so that the “sun does not smite them by day, nor the moon by night.” *In the second place*, This shadow protects from the heat of inward convictions, the wrath of God, and the curses of a fiery law. When the sinner is wakened up from the deep sleep of nature, often, as in the case of Job, “The arrows of the Almighty are within him, the poison whereof drinketh up his spirit; the terrors of God do set themselves in array against him.” Then, with David, he says, “While I suffer thy terrors, I am distracted; thy fierce wrath goeth over me.” When there is an accusing conscience within, and an angry God without, and a yawning hell beneath, the sinner is almost driven to despair; and feels that there are no scorplings like the scorplings of conscience by the wrath of God. Go where he may, it is a dry and parched land. The tongue of love can speak no peace—the hand of affection can strew no flowers on the path—the soul refuses to be comforted. Now, while in

such seasons as these, when man can find no satisfaction to his soul in earth's purest streams, and no rest to the sole of his foot beneath any of earth's shadows—when that hearth and that home, whose very name seems to breathe rest, and peace, and joy, say, "They are not in me;" when even the house of God, and the meeting for prayer, where "the wells of salvation" are open, and the banner of redeeming love waves, are as a dry place and a weary land; then the sight of Christ, the apple tree, is like "cold waters to a thirsty soul," and "as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." No sooner does Christ say, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest," than there is a great calm; and the rejoicing soul says, "I sat down under his shadow with great delight." God's wrath may roll in fiery floods upon Christless souls—the curses of a fiery law may fall with fearful effect upon the guilty; but Christ's person, and blood, and righteousness, are a shadow through which they cannot come, and beneath which the guiltiest are safe. "There is now *no* condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus." *In the third place*, This shadow protects from the heat of Satan's temptations. The darts of Satan, which stir up these, are indeed "fiery darts;" and nothing can ward them off but the blood, and righteousness, and grace of Christ. These preserve from Satan's suggestions, and protect from his temptations. "Thou hast been a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall." By Christ, "the blast of the terrible ones"—those fiery darts—those fiends of hell—"is brought low." (Is. xxv. 44.)

(2.) *Sitting under this shadow.* It will do no good to the weary, fainting traveller merely to look at the shady tree; he must come under it. Now, sitting under this shadow implies three things: *First, personal application to Christ.* It will do you no good simply to hear about Christ, or to have clear views of certain truths and doctrines concerning him. You must actually and really come and sit under this shadow, get into the clefts of the rock, cover you with the white robe of his righteousness, wash you in the open fountain of his blood. "Purge *me* with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash *me*, and I shall be whiter than snow." There are many other shadows under which you will be tempted to sit down—the shadow of prayer, the shadow of reading and hearing the word, the shadow of self-repentance, the shadow of a blameless life, the shadow of religious knowledge; sitting under these, many say, peace, peace, when there is no peace. "Take heed that no one deceive you; for many shall come in Christ's name, saying, I am Christ, and deceive many." If the devil succeed in getting you to rest in knowledge, or profession, or duty, he keeps you as completely away from Christ as if you were "afar off" in the ways of pro-

fligacy and presumptuous sin. *Second*, This sitting imports *rest*. Whenever the sinner sits down under this shadow, he finds rest. "Come unto me, ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." The sinner has a restless *conscience*, and a restless *heart*; the one is full of guilt, and therefore "he *goes about* to establish his own righteousness;" the other is full of unsatisfied desires, and therefore he goes from mountain to hill, yea "*labours* in the very fire, and wearies himself for very vanity;" and still he is restless as before. But whenever he comes to him whose name is "The Lord our righteousness," his conscience finds rest; and in him who is the Portion of his people, his heart finds rest; for he says to him, "Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it." "Pray for a choosing faith; pray for an eye to discern the apple tree. Oh! there is no rest for the soul except under that branch which God has made strong." *Third*, It imports *delight*. "I *sat down* under his shadow *with great delight*." It is when the sinner has come to Jesus, *after* he has sat down under his shadow, that he has great delight. "*Believing*, ye rejoice." In sitting beneath the shadow of Jesus there is indeed *great delight*—a peace that *passeth understanding*, a joy *unspeakable*, a *full joy*. In Christ's presence "there is fulness of joy." As the believer sits beneath this shadow, and looks back to what he has escaped from—the "horrible pit" and the "miry clay,"—and forward to what he is safe from—"the wrath to come"—and to what he is sure of—"an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away,"—he "*greatly rejoices*." And as he tastes that love which is better than wine, and has smiles from that face which are better than life, he sits and sings: "The King hath brought me into his chambers; we will be glad, and rejoice in thee." Then also every grace revives. "They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon." Not so delightful to the weary, sun-beaten traveller is the shade of that spreading tree, as is the shadow of Christ to him who has felt the heat of God's burning anger in the conscience; and how vain all other saviours, and how empty all other worldly cisterns are! If you want a joy which nothing can take away—a joy which is heaven begun on earth—a joy which will make *the heart* laugh and the face shine, and "the feet, like hinds' feet," to run in the path of duty, and to "walk upon the high places" of privilege; (Hab. iii. 18, 19)—then here it is: "I sat down under his shadow with great delight."

(3.) *The fruit of this tree*. "His fruit was sweet to my taste." It is not till the believer sits beneath the shadow of this tree, "abides under it," that he eats its fruit, which is so sweet to his taste. "It is customary in the East, when people sit under the shade of a fruit tree,

to enjoy the refreshing coolness, for the owner, or a friend, to shake the fruit down on their heads. Thus Dr Pocock tells us, that when he was at Sidon, he was entertained in a garden, under the shade of some apricot trees, and the fruit of them was shaken down upon him for his repast.\* Coming to Christ, sitting under his shadow, we eat his fruit. And here take note, that the fruit of Christ, speaking generally, is whatever Christ has spoken, done, or suffered for us—all the privileges of the New Covenant, which he purchased by his blood, and applies by his Spirit. *First*, The pardon of sin is an apple from this tree, which is very sweet to the taste. “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.” Never do the lips of Jesus drop more “sweet smelling myrrh” than when he says to the anxious sinner: “Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee.” *Second*, Righteousness. “The gift of righteousness, which is by one Jesus Christ.” “He is made of God unto us, righteousness.” How sweet is this apple to the taste! “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garment of salvation; he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness.” *Third*, Adoption. “For ye are all the children of God, by faith in Christ Jesus.” And therefore “God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father.” How sweet, how very sweet to the taste, is this spirit of adoption, whereby we can lay our heads on a Father’s loving bosom, and look on a Father’s loving face, and say, “Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!” *Fourth*, The gifts of the Spirit. Present peace, present joy, assurance of God’s love, his strengthening, comforting, quickening, enlightening grace—all these are the fruit of this tree; for Christ “has the *seven* Spirits of God;” and they are very sweet unto the taste, when he whose “mouth is most sweet” says, “Receive ye the Holy Ghost.” *Finally*, “All the exceeding great and precious promises.” These are all the fruit of this tree, for they are all yea and amen in Christ. These promises are very sweet to the believer. “How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!” They are like flowers plucked out of heaven’s own garden, clusters of grapes from Canaan’s own land, drops of myrrh from Jesus’ own lips. “Stay me with flagons, comfort me with these apples;” for they are very sweet to the taste. “As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.”

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\* Paxton’s Illustrations of Scripture.

## SERMON CIX.

COMMUNION WITH GOD.

BY THE REV. ALEXANDER HISLOP, ARBROATH.

“ Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.”—JAMES, iv. 8.

IN considering these words as the subject of discourse, I propose, by the help of God's Spirit,

- I. In the first place, to open up the meaning of the text.
- II. Secondly, to show how a sinner ought to draw nigh unto God.
- III. And lastly, to state some motives to induce him to do so.

I. In the first place then, with regard to the meaning of the passage, it is of importance, in order to arrive at just conclusions on the subject, that you distinctly understand what it does *not* mean. The pride and self-sufficiency of the natural heart of man in considering a passage such as this, are ever prone to wrest it to his own destruction, and to convert that which, when rightly understood, contains a most glorious truth, into a poisonous and deadly error. Men of legal and Arminian spirits contend, that we are hereby taught that, in the great work of conversion, the first effective movement, is and must be, on the part of man—that the sinner *first*, of his own free will, returns unto God, and that then, but not till then, does the grace of God take effect upon his soul. Now this is in direct opposition to the whole tenor of Scripture. The very nature of that state into which man by transgression fell, renders it impossible that a sinner can, by any will or power of his own, return unto God. When man was made in the glorious image of his Creator, the life of his soul was only and entirely in God. The moment that he fell—the moment that he was cast off by God in fulfilment of the threatened curse, “ In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die,” in that moment did spiritual life utterly forsake his soul. The separation betwixt him and God was complete: the extinction of his spiritual life was consequently the same. When, therefore, we read that men in their natural state are dead in trespasses and sins, we are not to regard the expression as merely a strong figure of speech, but as one pregnant with meaning, displaying in all the naked and stern simplicity of truth, the absolute hopelessness and helplessness of our case. Not more certainly does the separation of the soul from

the body leave our earthly frame to total dissolution and decay, than does the separation of the soul from God issue in the immediate and complete extinction of the spiritual life of that soul. The soul that is forsaken of God, has not, and cannot have, one particle of real goodness, or of any thing truly pleasing in the sight of God. When, therefore, the putrid corpse that lies rotting in the grave shall, by its own power, rise from the dust and rejoin the spirit that has left it, then shall lost and ruined man, by his own moral strength, return unto the God from whom he has so fatally revolted. But the case is even worse than this. Not merely is there no power—not merely is there no free will on the part of man to draw near unto God: there is a positive, and, as far as he himself is concerned, an incurable aversion and antipathy to Him and his service. “The carnal mind is enmity against God—it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” Until, therefore, this enmity be subdued by effectual grace from on high, until sinners be made willing in the day of God’s power, until He himself work in them both to will and to do of his good pleasure, they will not, and they cannot, take one step in return: they will not, and they cannot, do any thing but revolt more and more, and every day depart farther and farther from the living God. The nature of the case, and the express words of Scripture, alike combine to prove, that no man can come unto Christ, which is the same as to come unto God, “except the Father draw him.” Never yet did one of the fallen race of Adam truly and sincerely draw nigh unto God, until God, by his mighty and efficacious grace, had first drawn nigh unto his soul. Does the sinner feel within his heart the slightest spark of real desire after God, the most faint and feeble inclination truly to seek his face, then, beyond all question, God has been there.

How, then, are we to understand the text, “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you?” We are to understand it as conveying a gracious promise of conscious and sensible communion with the Father of our spirits to every one who makes a true and acceptable approach unto God—a promise that just as truly as the returning sinner feels his own heart going up unto God, so shall he feel God in his loving kindness and tender mercy coming down into his soul. While the very first breathing of a soul after God, is merely the effect of God’s presence and power in that soul, it is nevertheless true, that real and efficacious grace may have been working upon a sinner’s heart for some considerable time before the man himself may have any distinct or sensible proof of the gracious designs of God in respect to him. Cases there may have been in which God may, at once, without any previous exercise on the part of man, have revealed himself as a God

of love and plenteous redemption, in which that Scripture may have been graciously fulfilled, "I am found of them that sought not for me." But in his ordinary dealing with sinful men, his procedure generally is, to communicate first the grace to *seek* him, and then the grace to *find* him. And most certain it is, that no man has the slightest warrant to expect, that if he do not really, heartily, and perseveringly seek God's face, he shall ever experience that favour of his which is life, and that loving kindness which is better than life. And a most vile and blasphemous delusion it is, and sprung from the bottomless pit, for any one to fold his hands in indolence, and soothe himself in a course of sin with the thought, that because he has no power in himself to repent and turn unto God, therefore he may give himself no concern, and put himself to no trouble on the subject, because, that when the day of God's power comes, he shall be willing to return and obey, but that, till that day comes, it is vain for him to think of it. Let such a person know, if any such there be here, that his damnation is just, and that, without a miracle of grace, it is not more just than it is certain. You have no power, dear friends, of yourselves, to turn unto God, but you yourselves must turn unto God, otherwise you perish. You have no ability of your own whereby you can draw nigh unto him, but he invites you, he commands you *now* to draw nigh, and he offers you strength to enable you to do so. If you seek him, you *shall* find him. If you draw nigh in prayer to him, he *will* draw nigh in mercy and gracious communion to you.

II. How then, in the second place, ought a sinner to draw nigh unto God.

1. First, he must draw nigh unto God by the way of his own appointment, and that way is Christ. The angels that kept their first estate, and that never sinned, appear in their own name, and in their own righteousness before God, and are accepted in his sight. On the same ground did man before his fall enjoy free and delightful intercourse with his Maker. But that old way, the way of works, our apostacy from God hath barred up, completely and for ever. Without righteousness, and that a perfect righteousness, answerable to the spotless holiness of his nature and his law, no creature can come with acceptance before God. "With him evil cannot dwell, nor fools stand in his sight." "He is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and he cannot look upon sin." But man is altogether corrupt, altogether defiled with sin. In him, that is, in his flesh, dwelleth no good thing. It is impossible that a creature so vile, so utterly lost to every thing that is good, can present any thing to his Maker that can recommend him to his

favour. He must therefore have another righteousness than his own in which to appear before the Holy God. But where is he to find a righteousness that will stand him in stead, that will avail him for his acceptance with God? Not in saints, not in angels, not in the whole universe beside, except in Him who is the incarnate Son of God. As there is but "one God," so there is but "one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus." "I am the way, the truth, and the life," said our Redeemer himself, "No man cometh unto the Father, but by me." If we *will* madly plume ourselves on our own righteousness—if we *will* not receive the testimony of God with regard to our lost and ruined state—if we *will* fondly cling to the flattering delusion, that we are rich and increased in goods, and standing in need of nothing—if we will not submit ourselves unto the righteousness of God as revealed in the obedience and sacrifice of his son, we *may* presumptuously think of drawing nigh unto God, but *he* will not draw nigh unto us, he will shut his ears to our prayers, he will turn away his face from us, the tokens of his love will be denied to our souls. But if, with an humble and a contrite heart confessing our sins, and justifying God for the strictness of that inflexible law that condemns us, we lift up the eye of faith unto Him who bore the sins of all the redeemed in his own body on the tree, and sitteth now a priest upon his throne, pleading the merits of his life and death for all that come unto God by him, then shall our hearts be sprinkled by his blood from an evil conscience, then shall our persons be clothed with a righteousness, in which that eye which is as a flame of fire shall see no stain of pollution, or of sin. Then only can God look upon fallen man with a pleasant countenance. If therefore, my friends, you would know the love of God, you must come unto him through the true and living way, through the rent veil of the Redeemer's flesh. If you will not first come unto Christ, you *cannot* draw nigh unto God—God *will* not draw nigh unto you. Alas, dear friends, if you were truly alive to your own natural state—if you were but deeply convinced of the evil of sin—if you had only eyes to see the holiness and the majesty of the God whose law you have broken, you would not *dare* to come in the filthy rags of your own righteousness, into his awful presence. Let no one think that God, the God with whom we have to do, is a less dreadful and terrible God than he who revealed himself on Mount Sinai to Israel of old, in thunder, and lightning, and blackness, and tempest. The external dispensation is changed, the revelation of the awful attributes of God before the eyes of men is postponed. But the attributes of God ever have been, and ever will be, the same. And to those who venture to approach him without respect to the righteousness and atonement of Christ, our God is still a consuming fire. In times of youth, and health,



and prosperity, and carnal security, while your eyes are blinded by the god of this world, you may think it a small matter to approach in your own name to the Most High God; you may think it no great act of grace and condescension, if he should hear and answer the prayers of such honest, upright, and virtuous individuals as you may conceive yourselves to be. But if God should only lift up a very small corner of the veil which, by nature, is over your hearts, and give you a glimpse of his glory, you would look in vain for your righteousness; and instead of feeling any confidence to approach to him, the feeling of your heart would be akin to that experienced by those who, in the great day of wrath, shall call upon the rocks to fall upon them, and the mountains to cover them from the face of his Majesty. In Christ only is God reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing unto men their trespasses.

2d, In drawing nigh unto God, a sinner must have a sense not only of his own unrighteousness, but of his own helplessness. He must come unto God, not only trusting for acceptance to the merits of Christ, but relying for strength upon the Holy Ghost. It is only when we are weak, that we are really strong. It is only when truly sensible of our own inability, that we shall apply for the strength which is made perfect in weakness. I have already had occasion to show, that unless power be first exerted upon us from on high, we shall never take one step in return to God. I observe now, that that power which effectually draws unto Christ, and unto God by him, is the power and grace of the blessed Spirit of God. He it is that alone can convince us of sin, that can reveal Christ unto us, that can persuade and enable us to embrace him, although so freely offered in the gospel. "The natural man," saith Paul, "receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God," in other words, the gospel; "but they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned," that is, by the power of the Holy Ghost. If, therefore, the faith which is in us be only the offspring of our own minds, if it result merely from the exercise of our own faculties, if it be not produced by the almighty power of the Holy Ghost, our faith is only a delusive imaginary faith, a faith that will never interest us in the righteousness of Christ, that will not bring us near unto God, that will never bring communications of grace into our souls, that will never deliver us from the wrath to come. Without the Holy Ghost, we can not breath one prayer that shall enter with acceptance into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. However ardent may be the emotions we feel in drawing nigh unto him, however importunate our supplications, however unwearied our attendance on the worship of God, yet, if these arise not from the Spirit's work upon our hearts, our

prayers, our tears, our supplications, are polluted and abominable in his sight. They spring only from the old corrupted, sin-defiled, nature, and come not up before God perfumed with the incense of Christ's righteousness and atoning death. Nothing that has not come down from God, can ever ascend to God. Under the ceremonial law, this great truth was taught in the injunction, that no fire should be used in consuming the sacrifices offered unto God, except that which had come down from heaven. And under the dispensation of Christianity, we are as clearly taught, that unless we be baptized with the Holy Ghost, as with fire, our faith is vain, our prayers, our worship, our sacrifices, are utterly vain. If, therefore, dear friends, you would draw nigh with acceptance, and feel the love of God shed abroad in your hearts, you must "pray in the Holy Ghost."

3d, You must draw nigh to God in *all* his ordinances. All the ordinances of God are appointed by the same authority, and depend upon the same gracious blessing for their efficacy. If sinful man will presume to pick and choose from among these, which he will observe and which he will neglect, he ought not to be surprised that he finds them wells without water unto his soul. If, for instance, a man thinks fit to draw near unto God in the public exercise of his worship, but makes not conscience of diligently waiting upon him in secret; if he comes on the Sabbath into God's house as God's people come, and sits as God's people sit, but all the while never thinks of entering into his closet and shutting to the door when at home, has such a one any right to complain that he never gets so much as a crumb of the children's bread? that, while the fleeces of others are wet with the refreshing dews of heaven, his is dry and unmoistened? that, while others are perceiving the goings of their God in the sanctuary, and rejoicing in the light of his countenance, he is sitting a blind, dead, stupid, insensible soul, without eyes 'to see, or a heart to feel, the glory of that grace that is shining and working around him? Again, if the devil, changing himself into an angel of light, should persuade you that because the word of God contains all that is needful for salvation, and because the Holy Ghost is all-sufficient to instruct you and make that word effectual, therefore you need not attend upon the ministrations of sinners like yourselves, therefore you may warrantably absent yourselves from the courts of God's house, or come only when it may suit your convenience; do you think that you would have any reason to expect his blessing even upon the inspired record of salvation, whilst you are living in violation of the solemn injunction, "not to forsake the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is?" If his holy providence should *disable* you from attending on the public ordinances of religion, in such a case, you

might warrantably and confidently expect his countenance and blessing upon the rest. But if you labour under no such restraint, deceive not yourselves: God will not draw nigh to you in *any* of his ordinances, if you do not draw nigh to him in *all* of them.

4th, Lastly, you must draw nigh to God with clean hands and with a pure heart. In the clause immediately following the text, it is added, "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, purify your hearts ye double-minded." It is vain for you to look for deliverance from the guilt of sin through the blood of Christ, to profess dependance upon the grace of the Holy Ghost in your approaches to God, if you are walking in any course of sin, if you are practising any known iniquity. You may be ever so orthodox in your creed, ever so zealous for the purity of the faith—you may be punctual and exact in your attendance upon the worship of God—it is even conceivable, that, to pacify your consciences, you may call upon his name in secret; but if there be only one sinful practice in which you allow yourselves, all your other observances will be unavailing. There is an Achan in the camp, and till the accursed thing be put away, there is nothing but wrath and woe denounced against you. That such a course of conduct on the part of the professed people of God is as absurd as it is wicked, is clear; but it is not on that account the less frequently to be met with. God's ancient people were often sternly rebuked for this very thing. "Cry aloud, spare not," says God, by the prophet Isaiah, "lift up thy voice like a trumpet, show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness and forsook not the ordinance of their God; they ask of me the ordinances of justice, they take delight in approaching to God." That which was the case then, is but too often the case still. In every age of the Church there have been such spots in her feasts of charity, "sporting themselves with their own deceivings." Such may flatter themselves with the hopes of heaven and final salvation; but without repentance, their hope is the hope of the hypocrite that shall utterly perish. "Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom: give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah, to what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me, saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand to tread my courts? Your new moons, and your appointed feasts, my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me, I am weary to bear them. And when you spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear."

But those who would make an acceptable approach unto God, must

draw near, not only with clean hands, but with pure hearts. The God with whom we have to do, will not be put off with bodily service, however faultless. He is a spirit, and they who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. He requireth truth in the inward parts. If I regard iniquity in my heart, says David, the Lord will not hear me. Not only the sinful practice, but the unholy desire, will cut off from us the light of his gracious countenance. If we would come to him with acceptance, we must renounce every wicked way, and every unrighteous thought, at once, completely, and for ever. And not only those things which are in their own nature positively sinful, but every thing that comes in competition with his glory must be equally abandoned. He requires the first, the chiefest place in our hearts and affections. He will admit of no compromise, he will not dwell in a double or divided heart, a heart that wishes to serve at one and the same time Christ and the world, God and Mammon. God in Christ must be all to you, or he will be nothing. If you do not choose to serve him in this way, you cannot serve him at all. You may seek him prayerfully and carefully all your life long, but if you set up the stumbling blocks of your iniquity before your eyes, if you will not consent to give him that place in your affections which he challenges as his due, you shall seek him in vain. Are there here any poor deluded sinners, who, up to this moment, have been satisfying themselves with a name to live, who have been trusting to a form of godliness, while they denied the power of it? Let them hear the righteous requirement of God's Word. "Ye shall seek me, and find me," saith the Lord. When? "when ye shall search for me *with your whole heart.*" If ye will not search for him thus, you may give up the search. The pure in heart, and the pure in heart only, have the blessed assurance that they shall see God, that their fellowship shall be with the Father and with his son Jesus Christ.

III. I come now very briefly to present to you some motives that ought to induce you with all your hearts to draw nigh unto God.

1. And first, consider the graciousness of the invitation. By looking at the context, you will find that it is addressed to "adulterers and adulteresses." To those who are puffed up with a notion of their own goodness, this will be no recommendation; but, if there be one poor and contrite and broken-hearted sinner among those whom I am now addressing, this will be felt to be exactly such an invitation as he needs. Yes, ye adulterers and adulteresses, if any such there be here—ye drunkards, ye profane, ye wicked and abominable of every description, ye vilest of the vile, the invitation of the text is addressed even to you. Ye may have added iniquity unto iniquity, and sin to sin—ye may, by

your wickedness, have made yourselves the offscourings of the earth, and a hissing and a byword to your neighbours and acquaintance but here is good news, here is joyful tidings for you. The God of heaven and of earth, who has all glory and blessedness in himself, who needs not the services of men or of angels, looks down upon you with an eye of the most tender compassion: he invites, he entreats, he beseeches\* you to draw nigh unto him, that you may have life, that you may have holiness and everlasting salvation. And that he is in earnest in the invitation, intensely in earnest, has been abundantly demonstrated by the fact, that he spared not the son of his love, but hath freely given him up to the death, the accursed death of the cross, that the very chief of sinners, the most abandoned of the ungodly, might have pardon, and peace, and the love of God shed abroad in their hearts. He gave up the well-beloved of his heart, the Elect in whom his soul delighted, to be baptized with the baptism of wrath, that sinners such as you might be baptized with the sanctifying and comforting grace of the Holy Ghost. Ah! my friends, if the love of God in the gift of his Son, and his gracious invitation to you, to all to partake of that love, will not move you to return unto him, what is there that can possibly influence your hard and obdurate hearts? Now, while God offers you his unspeakable gift—while Christ offers you himself, how do you treat the offer? Can you not find in your hearts to accept of it? Then, hear, O heavens! and be astonished, O earth! the High and the Holy One comes down from the throne of his glory, to this world of sin and sorrow, bears in his spotless soul the curse of the broken law in the room of fallen man, and now invites and beseeches sinners, by the agonies of the garden and the cross, to be reconciled unto God. And yet, men, whose breath is in their nostrils, who are every moment in danger of eternal perdition, can doubt—and consider—and hesitate—whether they will accept of a full and free salvation, whether they will consent to be delivered from the wrath to come. Now, whoever heard of infatuation like this? Can you possibly so sin against your own souls, as to put away from you so great salvation? Can you resist the mercy of a crucified and beseeching Saviour? Oh! the blessed angels of God are amazed at your blindness and obduracy, The very spirits of darkness, that tempt and cheat you, are laughing you to scorn for your inconceivable madness.

2d, But secondly, consider the greatness of the benefit that will be secured you, if you draw nigh unto God with your whole heart, in the way of his own gracious appointment; “God will draw nigh unto you.” “If any man” said our Saviour, “love me, he will keep my

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\* “As though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled unto God.” 2 Cor. v. 20.

words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." You will have communion with the Father of your spirits; you will henceforth and for ever be temples of the Holy Ghost; God will manifest himself unto you as he doth not unto the world; he will make you, even in this vale of tears, drink of the rivers of pleasure which are at his right hand; he will show you the "glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." All your interests, both for this life and that which is to come, will be infallibly safe. All things shall be yours, "Whether the world, or life, or death, or things present or things to come, all are yours; and ye Christ's, and Christ is God's." Prosperity shall no longer, as to the men of the world, be a trap and a snare unto you; and adversity shall only work out for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Goodness and mercy shall follow you all the days of your life, and you shall dwell in the house of the Lord for evermore. And oh! dear friends, are not these benefits, are not these blessings worth seeking, yea, worth striving for? What are all the pursuits, the pleasures, the riches, the honours of this world in comparison of these, but shadows, but phantoms, but dreams, which give no real satisfaction while they are possessed, and which must soon fly away for ever. Oh! give not sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to your eye-lids, till you find a place in your hearts for the mighty God of Jacob. Now, even now, Christ Jesus stands at the door of your hearts and knocks; now, even now, he says, if any man will open the door, I will come in unto him and will sup with him, and he with me. Will you allow him to knock in vain?

*3dly.* It would be but little encouragement merely to hold up to you the blessings of communion with God, if you were left in any doubt or uncertainty as to whether these blessings are attainable or not. Now this is the glory of the gospel, that it lays the most solid ground for your assurance of success. This is indeed the only thing of which you can be absolutely certain, that you shall gain it, seek as earnestly as you may. Riches may take wings to themselves and fly away from those who most diligently pursue them. Pleasure may elude the grasp of her most devoted votary. Shame and contempt may be the portion of those who most earnestly and skilfully hunt after fame and renown. But no man ever yet sought the favour and friendship of God with his whole heart, who missed of his aim; and no man ever *shall* have to complain that he drew nigh unto him in the way of his appointment, and that his labour was in vain. And why? Because the word of God is pledged, that they that "seek him shall find him, that every one that asketh receiveth, and that to him that knocketh, the door shall be opened." Will you believe the word of a mortal man, and will you not believe the word of Him who can neither lie nor deceive? Nay, he has not merely

pledged his word on the subject, he has given you his oath. "As I live," saith the Lord, "I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his way and live. Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die, O house of Israel?" If a fellow creature, of whose goodness and truth you are convinced, were to invite you to partake of his bounty, would you ever think of doubting your warrant to accept of his invitation; and will you repose less confidence in God? When Christ Jesus invites you to come unto him, that you may have life, and that you may have it more abundantly, will you dare to question his sincerity, or hang back in doubt of his willingness to receive you." "Whosoever will," saith he, "let him come and take of the water of life freely." "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." If he were to call you expressly by name, he could not more explicitly invite you; and will you dare to doubt that the merciful Saviour, the faithful and true witness, means what he says? Let the thought perish. I call heaven and earth to witness, that the offer of a full, a free, and eternal salvation, has been made to every one of you this day, and that if ye *will* not come unto him, your blood will be upon your own heads, your own consciences will bear witness against you in the day of the Lord.

*Athly*, and lastly, I beseech you to consider the dreadful consequences which will result to you from your continued estrangement from God. "All they that are afar from thee shall perish." You shall perish, because you have broken God's righteous law; you shall doubly perish, because you have rejected the offered grace of his gospel. You have had one more opportunity of hearing the message of peace and reconciliation. Christ Jesus has been pleading with you; the Holy Ghost, I doubt not, has been striving with you; and if you are unwilling still to submit to the mercy of God, your bands are every day growing the stronger, and if you persist in the stubbornness and impenitency of your hearts, you will be driven away at last in your wickedness. In your bitter experience, you shall know the dreadfulness of mercy abused. You shall feel the full weight of the wrath of the Lamb, as recorded for your warning in the Book of Proverbs, "Because I have called, and ye have refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded, but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof, I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh, when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind, when distress and anguish cometh upon you, then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer, they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me." Oh, then, now while it is the accepted time, now while it is the day of salvation, hear ye the word of the Lord. "Draw nigh unto God" in the way of his own appointment, and beyond all question, "God will draw nigh" in his mercy and loving kindness "unto you." Amen,

## S E R M O N C X .

IMPORTUNATE PRAYER.

BY THE REV. ROBERT SMITH, D.D., LOCHWINNOCH.

“ And Jacob said, I will not let thee go except thou bless me : and he blessed him there.”—  
 GEN. xxxii. 26-29.

IT is now many years since Mr Stewart of Liverpool called the attention of Christians to the important duty of united and earnest prayer for the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit, for the purpose of reviving true religion at home, and promoting its dissemination throughout the world. At that time he recommended ministers to preach upon the subject, and in other ways to diffuse information with regard to the person and work of the Holy Ghost. He advised private Christians to spend a portion of time every Lord's day morning in prayer for the Holy Spirit, and heads of families to introduce the subject into their domestic exercises on Monday evening. On that occasion I have a full persuasion that many discourses were delivered on this subject throughout the Church, and I suppose many individuals and families have ever since observed the seasons of devotion recommended. The subject has not been dropt, but kept alive, and more generally taken up of late years. Mr Stewart continues to call public attention to it at this season of the year.\* And first, a society of private Christians, and next, the Commission of the Free Church, have recommended an annual concert for prayer, to last a whole week, including two Sabbaths, and corresponding to the length of time spent by the disciples in devotional exercises in Jerusalem, before the Holy Ghost was poured out upon them on the day of Pentecost. It would be wrong to conclude that our united and long-continued supplications have obtained no answer, and produced no effect. Who can tell how many sinners have been converted, and what an impulse has been given to pious affection and benevolent enterprise. There have been revivals of religion in various places in the course of the time specified. Scriptural views of the true nature of the Church of Christ have been

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\* This discourse was delivered during the time of Concert for Prayer at the beginning of this year 1846, which will explain the specialties it contains, and may serve as an apology, if that be wanted, for its not being more broad and general.



unfolded and illustrated, and the most striking displays of religious principles have been afforded. Men have become more alive to the important duty of promoting the interests of religion, both at home and abroad, and unwonted success has been experienced in the conversion both of Jew and Gentile. The most important events have taken place, and others of still greater magnitude and importance are opening up to the view of attentive and intelligent men. Still much remains to be done. The field expands as you proceed in the survey of it. The more that is done the more you discover remains to be done. No intelligent and right-hearted man is satisfied with the state of his own soul, nor the condition of his family, the state of the congregation of which he is a member, or the denomination to which he belongs, the country he inhabits, or the world at large. All, therefore, who have right apprehensions of these things will join heartily in the prayers which are to be presented for "the Spirit from on high" in the closet and in family worship, in the social assembly and in the house of God, at this important season. The words of the text are well calculated to afford direction and encouragement in the performance of this duty, in the illustration of which there are three things which demand our attention—

I. The objects.

II. The manner, and

III. The answer of Jacob's prayer ; or, in other words, the blessings implored, the manner in which they were asked, and the answer obtained. Allow me, then, to direct your attention—

*I. To the objects of Jacob's prayer ; or, the blessings implored.*

It need not be disguised that one of these was the preservation of his own life, and the safety of his family and substance. By falsehood and deceit he had obtained the blessing, which Isaac his father intended to bestow on Esau ; and having now got both the birth-right and the blessing, he had become his brother's supplanter, as the name Jacob imports. Esau was so enraged that he conspired against his life, and Jacob was obliged to fly from his father's house to his uncle Laban. This ungodly and avaricious relative deceived and imposed upon him just as he had done to Esau, which was an evidence of the righteous retribution of Providence, and a severe reproof to Jacob. At length he was by cruelty and oppression obliged to fly from Padan-arani, and return to the place of his nativity. In his way thither he was told that Esau, accompanied by four hundred men, was coming to meet him. Knowing the furious temper of his brother, and remembering the offence he had given him, he was alarmed, and suspected that he might now take summary vengeance upon him and destroy the mothers with the children, and take

possession of all that he had. In this emergency he disposed of them in the most judicious manner, and adopted the most likely means of appeasing his brother's wrath. And then, as his last and best resource, he retired to a secret place, and wrestled with God in prayer till the dawning of the day, that he would avert the sore calamity which he dreaded.

It would be doing Jacob injustice, however, to deny that higher objects than the preservation of himself, and of his family and substance, occupied his thoughts and prayers on this critical occasion. The very circumstances in which he was placed were calculated to call his sins to remembrance; just as his sons were reminded of their unnatural and criminal conduct towards Joseph, by being thereby involved in difficulties in Egypt many long years after their sin had been committed. Jacob being reminded of the falsehood and deceit by which he had provoked the anger and vengeance of his brother, would humbly confess his sin and earnestly pray for the salvation of his soul, whatever might be the fate of his body at this time. Knowing that the souls of his family were as precious as his own, and remembering the relation in which he stood to them, and the duty that he owed them, he would be very importunate in prayer for their salvation also, though they should fall by the sword of Esau. But he would not despair of their preservation. He would remember the covenant of God with his father Abraham, and the promise that he would make of him a great nation, and that in his seed, which is Christ, all the families of the earth would be blessed. Similar promises were made to himself; and, in a special manner, God engaged to be with him in his journey to Padan-aram, and to keep him in all his ways, to bring him back in safety to the land of Canaan, and make of him a great nation. Now, as Moses in every emergency was wont to plead the covenant of Jehovah with the patriarchs, and to intreat him to have respect to his own honour, as well as the good of his chosen people, Jacob would not fail to make good use of the same plea on the present occasion. He would pray that he and his family might live to be witnesses for God in a world lying in wickedness, and might introduce the spiritual seed, in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed.

Need I say that in all this Jacob has left us an excellent example for our imitation, especially in present circumstances. I have no objection to your praying for your own health and safety, and the preservation and prosperity of your family and substance, as Jacob did—ay, and the good of your kindred and country also. But I do not need to dwell upon these things, because they are least likely to be neglected. What I want especially to press upon your attention, is the state of your own

souls, and of those of your family, the congregation with which you are connected, and the church to which you belong, the condition of all professedly Christian churches, and the propagation of religion throughout the world. Every man, who is at all acquainted with his own heart, will find there many reasons for prayer. In every congregation there are some, alas! a large proportion of unregenerate men, who are the enemies of the true God, and the servants of the god of this world. They have turned their back upon heaven, and are posting on to perdition as fast as their feet can carry them. This year they may die—nay, this night they may lift up their eyes in hell, being in torment. O how earnest ought you, and especially they themselves, to be in prayer, that they may not perish, but obtain everlasting life! They should cry mightily and constantly for mercy to pardon their sin, and grace to help in time of need, till they obtain a gracious answer. Those who have already passed from death unto life are more sensible of their remaining corruption, and the iniquity that prevails against them, than the unregenerate are of their unpardoned guilt and unmitigated depravity; and I need not say how earnestly they should pray to be purified throughout, in soul, body, and spirit, and enabled to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord.

And thus every head of a family, who looks round the domestic circle, may see one and another of his children who, he has reason to fear, is still far from God, and ready to perish. A pious parent sometimes starts with horror, lest the child, whom he loves as his own soul, should die in his sins, and be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power. He hardly knows how he could bear such a calamity, and rise above it. Oh! how earnest, then, ought parents to be in prayer to God, that he would save them from so heavy an affliction. They should give him no rest till they see all their children devoted to his service, and living under the influence of religion.

But I should become tedious if I were to enlarge upon this subject. You can easily pursue it for yourselves. Whenever you see transgressors, you should be grieved, and pray for them. "Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him." Exhort one another daily, and so much the more as you see the day approaching. The wider the sphere of observation, the more reasons for prayer and supplication will rise up to your view. There are unscriptural and corrupt churches, and heresies among professing Christians. Popery and Puseyism are spreading in this country with alarming rapidity, and have acquired a most dangerous influence among those who are at the helm of affairs. Every government in Europe is at this moment giving its power to the beast. The Jews still remain in unbelief, and hun-

dreds of millions of Gentiles are bowing down to idols of gold and silver, wood and stone, the work of their own hands. You should therefore not merely pray for the ministers of religion among yourselves and throughout Christendom, but for the various missionaries that are scattered in foreign lands. I need not, however, occupy your time with an enumeration of the objects of prayer, which are as obvious as they are numerous. I shall therefore proceed call your attention

II. *To the manner in which the duty should be performed.* Jacob said, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." I shall not, however, confine your attention to the single element of importunity.

1. *He sought retirement for devotion.* In the 24th verse it is said, "He was left alone." Of this matter you have an account in the preceding context (verses 22 and 23). "And he rose up that night, and took his two wives, and two women-servants, and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford Jabbok. And he took them, and sent them over the brook, and sent over that he had." Having disposed of them in this manner, he remained alone, probably on the other side of the brook, that he might spend the night in prayer and supplication. You cannot fail to remark here the resemblance between the conduct of the patriarch and that of our blessed Redeemer. After he had sent his disciples away in a ship over the sea of Galilee, he went away into a mountain to pray, and continued alone in devotion during the greater part of the evening, till the fourth watch. Now, secret devotion is as necessary, I had almost said more necessary, for us than it was for the patriarch or our Lord, inasmuch as we have more sin to confess, and more wants to supply. Our Saviour had no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth. And of all kinds of prayer, secret devotion is the first and most essential. It is here the foundation is, as it were, laid; and we obtain in answer to private prayers a supply of the Spirit to enable us to engage with comfort and advantage in social and public duties. These are indeed more stimulating and refreshing, and may be profitable to others as well as to ourselves. But still we shall neither "get good, nor do much good," till our hearts be prepared for it by communion with God in secret devotion. We ought therefore, morning and evening, to retire from the world, and chase away its cares from our minds, enter our closets and shut our doors behind us, and pray to our Father in secret, and our Father who seeth in secret will reward us openly. As this is a primary and essential duty, so it is one that is more frequently discharged than some others. Every man who does not live like the beasts which perish, or like an infidel, who is in some respects worse than the irrational and irresponsible tribes, prays occa-

sionally in secret, were it only in cases of emergency, though he may neglect family worship altogether, and attend irregularly upon the house of God. But many who keep up the form of godliness pray in an improper manner, and without the spirit of devotion. They rush away from the bustle and business of the world, and spend a few minutes in formal and distracted prayer, in which not even the *understanding*, and still less the *heart*, is engaged. The sacrifice of such persons is an abomination unto the Lord, and their very prayers are sin. I therefore go on to observe,

2. *That Jacob spent a long time in prayer.* We have seen how he disposed of his family in the evening; and when he was left alone, he wrestled with God in prayer and supplication till the day began to break. You are also aware how exactly he typified, in this respect also, our divine Lord. And both have left us an example that we should follow their steps. Alas! most professing Christians follow these steps at a very great distance. And yet we shall never enjoy a high measure of spiritual health, nor be remarkably useful to others, till we learn to be much alone, and to spend a considerable portion of time in secret devotion. Without this we shall not obtain such a supply of the Spirit as to enlighten and enlarge our views, quicken and mature our graces, affect our hearts, and influence our conduct, so as to merit the testimony borne even to the Church of Ephesus—"I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them that are evil; and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and not fainted." The most eminent Christians have borne testimony both to the pleasure and advantage of holding much communion with God in secret. Abundant evidence of this is found in the life of the late singularly amiable and eminently pious Mr M'Cheyne in Dundee. Dr Doddridge used to spend a whole day every month in retirement and meditation, reading the Scriptures, and earnest prayer, and felt himself greatly refreshed and improved in this manner. When you go back to earlier and better times, to the ages of great men and stirring events, you find more striking examples. Luther, though he had less time to spare, and more work to perform, greater difficulties to surmount, and more formidable enemies to encounter than any man, perhaps, since the days of the apostles, never spent less than three hours daily in prayer; and our own John Welsh of Ayr devoted no less than eight hours daily to secret devotion. This was the grand source of their comfort and joy amid all their trials, and the great secret of their eminent piety and remarkable success in the service of their divine Master. These men would have thought such a concert for prayer as we have been called to observe, no hardship, but a great privilege. It does not make so

large a demand upon our time, as they habitually and cheerfully gave for their own comfort and improvement, and from a regard to the glory of God, and the salvation of the souls committed to their care. But this is not sufficient. The Pharisees both fasted and prayed oft. For a pretence they made long prayers, and stood in the synagogues and corners of the streets, that they might be seen of men. "And, verily," said our Lord, "ye have your reward." They obtained the admiration and praise of men, which was all they sought. But we must pray in a different spirit, and from different motives, if we expect a gracious answer from our heavenly Father. This leads me to remark,

3. *That we must implore lawful things, and employ proper arguments to obtain them.* This has been in some measure anticipated in the illustration of the first head; but I must still remark, that God will not grant you every thing you may choose to ask, and for every reason you may assign. Especially, he will not bestow upon you every temporal blessing you implore, nor avert every affliction you deprecate, because this might not be for his glory and your best interests. I do not deny that Jacob might pray in faith for the preservation of his own life and for the lives of his family, because his heavenly Father had promised all this. But we have no such promise, and therefore we must implore every temporal blessing with entire resignation to the holy will of God. But we may ask positively and importunately all the spiritual blessings formerly enumerated. If we pray in sincerity and faith, we shall certainly obtain these blessings in some measure for ourselves, and it may be, for others also.

With regard to the manner in which we ought to approach God, and the pleas we should use with him, we are better instructed than Jacob was. He did indeed plead the covenant of Jehovah with his fathers, Abraham and Isaac, of which Jesus Christ was the mediator; but we are better acquainted with this mediator than he was. We must come to him in the name and through the mediation of Jesus Christ, and he will not receive us, nor listen to us, on any other terms. We must plead his merits, and depend entirely upon his righteousness and grace; and we must cleave to him in the exercise of faith, in order that we may obtain out of his fulness every spiritual blessing. This entire dependence upon the righteousness and grace of Christ, however, should not make us indifferent about the blessings implored, and, therefore, I remark,

4. *That we ought to be earnest and persevering in prayer.* I can produce no arguments and illustrations of this matter equal to those which the Bible supplies. Look at this passage before us, where we are told that Jacob wrestled with Jehovah till the dawning of the day; and the prophet

Hosea tells us he wept, as well as made supplication before the angel. He struggled with him all night with strong cryings and tears, and would not let him go until he obtained the blessing. Even when the angel "put his thigh out of joint," and shewed how easily he could disable and destroy him, he was not dismayed, but continued to contend with the Almighty, and positively declared, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me." This is not the only passage in which believers are represented as having power to prevail with God in prayer. The Lord said unto Moses, "Let me alone that my wrath may wax hot against this people, and I may destroy them, and I will make of thee a great nation," as if the prayers of Moses had paralysed the arm of the Almighty. But Moses would not accept of the proffered honour, nor let him alone, but continued to intercede for his people till he prevailed as Jacob had done before. Think also of the earnestness and importunity of David, who not merely "cried" to God, but "even roared" before him. In the New Testament we read of disciples who not only strived but agonised in prayer. The best of all examples, however, in this, as in every other thing, was that of our Divine Redeemer, "who, in the days of his flesh, offered up prayers and supplications with strong cryings and tears to him that was able to deliver him from death, and was heard in that he feared." And let it not be objected that these examples are taken from the history of inspired men, whom we need not attempt to imitate, and cannot hope to equal. I purposely selected such examples, because, if I had adduced those of uninspired men, they might have been treated as hypocrites or enthusiasts, but the sacred writers cannot be treated in this manner. Fortified by them, I now go on to remark, that the same spirit of devotion has extended beyond the age of inspiration. I need adduce no other proofs of this than those which have already been mentioned. I remind you again of John Welsh, who not only spent eight hours daily in devotion, but rose to this duty during the night watches, and wondered how believers could sleep all night without rising to pray. He kept a covering beside him to protect him from the midnight cold, and at other times was wont to retire to the sea shore, or some other solitary place, that he might not be interrupted nor disturb others, and wept and prayed, or, like his divine master, offered up prayers and supplications with strong cryings and tears. I shall only add

5. *That we should pray in faith and hope.* Many do not approach God confiding in his mercy and believing his word, and still less trusting firmly in the righteousness and grace of Jesus Christ. If they honestly desire the blessings implored, they do not firmly believe that they shall obtain them. They only make a trial, so to speak, of the mercy

and truth of God, and are somewhat surprised when they obtain a gracious answer! No wonder, then, though it should happen to them according to their *unbelief*. They impeach the character of God, and give the lie to his holy word, cast discredit on the finished work of Jesus Christ, and call in question the purchased and proffered blessings of his Redemption. Instead of feeling and acting in this manner, we should approach God firmly persuaded that he is the rewarder of all those who diligently seek him. And whilst we neither *impugn nor doubt his sovereignty*, we should feel warranted on the *authority of his Word* to come boldly to a throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy to pardon, and grace to help in time of need. What the Apostle James says of *wisdom* may be affirmed of every other spiritual blessing we need. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering: for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." (James, i. 5-9.) The best evidence of the force of these observations is the fact recorded in the text. I, therefore, go on to call your attention very shortly.

### III. *To the answer which Jacob obtained to his prayers.*

God blessed him there. I can, however, now do little more than notice that he obtained a gracious answer. He, and all he had, escaped the vengeance which he dreaded at the hand of Esau, and he was met with more than fraternal affection. Jacob and his family continued to enjoy great worldly prosperity; and though his sons grieved him long, by their depravity and sins, yet before they went down into Egypt their spirit and character seem to have been greatly improved, and I hope some, if not all of them, are now in the kingdom of heaven.

I have already guarded you against asking positively, and expecting confidently, wealth or any kind of worldly prosperity. But I dare promise every believer a competent portion of the good things of this life. "Your bread shall be given you, and your water shall be sure." "My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." But this is the extent of the promise. It is not for your interest to be highly exalted and greatly enriched, for thereby you would be exposed to the greater temptations and dangers. God, who knows what situation is best for his people in this world, has generally placed them in humble circumstances. "He hath chosen the *poor* of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven. In the valley of humiliation, they not merely escape many dangers, but have an opportunity of recognising the hand of God more habitually in the means



of their support than if they were in more affluent circumstances. They have no inheritance to lean upon, and, when they are in difficulties, he sometimes answers their prayers in a marked and wonderful manner, and surprises them with his goodness. Their provision, like the manna, seems to come directly from heaven, and inspires them with a gratitude and affection which the rich never feel.

With regard to spiritual blessings, which are of paramount and permanent value, I can speak in a more positive and unqualified manner. God has often promised pardon and justifying righteousness, grace and salvation, to all who ask him in sincerity and faith. And though he be *sovereign* in this, as in every thing else, and may not bestow these blessings at the time and in the measure we expect, yet so far from being niggardly in his favours, he will often do exceeding abundantly above all that you ask or think. Ye are not straitened in him, but ye are straitened in your own desires. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled. There is much more reason, however, to expect a blessing on our *own* souls in answer to sincere and believing prayer, than that we shall be heard on behalf of those who do *not pray* for themselves. Still, when God does *stir* up his ministers and people to labour and pray for the conversion of sinners and the dissemination of the gospel, it is an evidence that the times of refreshing from his presence are approaching. The Word of God, and the history of the Church, alike confirm the truth of this observation. Look at Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones in the open valley. As soon as he began, in obedience to the divine commandment, to prophecy, (or preach), to the dry bones, there was a noise, and shaking among them; they came together, bone to his bone, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above, and they assumed all the appearance of living men, though there was no breath in them. And when he prophesied to the wind, that is, prayed for the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of the Lord entered into them, and they lived and stood up an exceeding great army. Although, therefore, we have not hitherto obtained all that we desire, yet I have no fear that our labours and prayers will be in vain. "For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may giye seed to the sower, and bread to the eater; so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void; but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."

Let me say, in conclusion, that so far from wondering or complaining, because we have not obtained more obvious answers to prayer, when we think of the character of many prayers, we must acknowledge

they deserve no answer at all. "Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss that ye may consume it on your lust." Besides, some men do not sincerely and honestly desire the things they seem to implore, and would be disappointed if they obtained them. They may think they wish the pardon of sin and an inheritance in heaven; but they are certainly not willing to forsake those sins they confess, and mortify those corruptions they seem to deplore; and they would rather forfeit the blessings implored than make the sacrifices required for the enjoyment of them. You must, therefore, learn to pray as Jacob did before you expect a similar answer. The Apostle Paul, who belonged to the strictest sect of the Pharisees, had prayed often and made long prayers before his conversion, yet he had never prayed aright till the period when the Lord bore this testimony to him from heaven, "Behold he prayeth." In like manner, though unregenerate men should pray, as well as read the Scriptures, attend on public instruction, and use other means of grace, yet I am bound to say, that, so long as they remain in an unregenerate state, they will never present a sincere and acceptable prayer. They ought therefore, to come at once to Christ, and cleave to him in the exercise of faith, and say with his disciples, "Lord, teach us to pray. Pour out upon us a spirit of grace and supplication." And thus you will obtain such views of the evil and danger of sin, and of the guilt and misery that prevail in the world, of the paramount importance of the glory of God and the salvation of souls, that you will emulate those believers who wrestled and agonised in prayer till they obtained a blessing. Though God should still keep the times and seasons of refreshing, and of bringing in the latter-day glory, in his own power, he may honour you to be the instruments of much good in the world, and, at any rate, you will obtain a rich blessing to your own souls, and be made unspeakably and eternally happy in heaven. For they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness like the stars for ever and ever.

## LECTURE XIV.

THE RAISING OF THE WIDOW'S SON AT NAIN.

BY THE REV. JAMES DODDS, BELHAVEN.

“ And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain ; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people. Now, when he came nigh to the gates of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow ; and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And he came and touched the bier : and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to this mother. And there came a fear on all : and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen among us : and, That God had visited his people.”—LUKE vii. 11-16.

THIS is one of the most striking and affecting miracles wrought by our Lord in the course of his ministry on earth. Along with the healing of the centurion's servant wrought on the preceding day, it formed a glorious attestation of the doctrine he had recently at great length preached in the audience of the people. Both of the mighty miracles, indeed, related at the commencement of this chapter, present a very good specimen of that kind of proof which the Son of Man, who spake as never man spake, invariably attached to his doctrine. Our blessed Lord, as is well known, went about not only teaching and preaching with an authority manifestly divine, but working all manner of signs and wonders ; and thus he exhibited his love to man both by words of purest instruction and by deeds of divine benevolence. While he enlightened the dark soul, he healed and strengthened the weak and afflicted body. At one and the same time he poured forth, as from an exhaustless fountain, the hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and by his almighty power subjected to his will all the elements of nature, feeding the hungry, healing the sick, and raising the dead. But his doctrines and his miracles are not to be considered merely as different modes of shewing his love to the children of men, different channels of conveyance for the riches of his grace ; they have an important relation to each other, which it is very necessary to examine and understand. The leading purpose of his miracles was to confirm his doctrines—to prove beyond all reasonable doubt that he was a teacher come from God, and taught indeed the things of God. “ The works that I do,” he himself says, “ bear witness

of me." (John v. 36.) His doctrines, on the other hand, cast a strong and vivid light upon his miracles, and show them to be characteristic of the divine nature, and full of spiritual meaning. The miracles attest the divinity of the doctrines, and the doctrines are frequently found typified or contained in the miracles. Each, taken singly, bears the impress of a heavenly origin, and might speak to every heart with a voice of divine power; but both together form one harmonious and resistless testimony to the divine commission, the almighty power, and overflowing mercy of the Saviour.

In accordance with his usual practice of confirming heavenly truth by mighty deeds, our Lord follows up the discourse he had just delivered in the hearing of the multitude by two great miracles—one wrought at Capernaum, immediately on his finishing all his sayings, and the other the next day at Nain. He had hitherto confined his miraculous power almost entirely to the healing of diseases and the relieving of infirmities, and it is possible that this raising of the widow's son at Nain was the first instance of his giving life to the dead. From the beginning to the close of his career, his miracles seem to rise in grandeur and importance: his divine power is, in a manner, displayed in manifestations more and more sublime, from the day when he changed water into wine at Cana of Galilee, to that memorable morning when he shook from him the iron bands of death, and burst the gloomy portals of the tomb. Up to this period he had healed many painful and inveterate diseases; he had rebuked fevers, cast out devils, cured the sick of the palsy, gave sight to the blind, made the lame to walk, and the dumb to speak. But now he exhibits a still more illustrious display of his Godhead, and stands still more gloriously confessed as the Creator and Lord of all, by summoning back the departed spirit, by recalling the breath of life into the dead, unconscious frame.

Verses 11 and 12. "And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain, and many of his disciples went with him, and much people. Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her."

Having healed the centurion's servant at Capernaum, our Lord, who went about continually doing good, the very next day proceeded to a city called Nain, doubtless still further to display his glory and his goodness. This city of Nain was not far distant from Capernaum, and was situated in the province of Galilee, about two miles to the south of Tabor, the mount of transfiguration. Hither did Jesus, attended by a multitude of disciples and much people, direct his steps. He knew what had happened there; he knew the bitter anguish of one widowed heart, and

he went on an errand of mercy and love. The crowd which surrounded him had lately heard the word of life, which flowed from his lips with an abundant fulness, and revealed the mysteries and duties of the kingdom of God; they had seen displayed the ample treasures of divine knowledge; and now they were to be favoured with an affecting but most sublime exhibition of divine power; they were to see the words of life confirmed by a life-giving deed.

Jesus, with the crowd of his followers, now approached the gates of the city, when, behold! another and very different crowd met him—a crowd of mourners bearing a lifeless body to the grave. They were carrying a dead man out of the city to the place of burial. In eastern countries, even at this day as at that time, the burial places are without the city walls, and lying apart from the din and bustle of human life, in the stillness and solitude of a more sequestered scene, bear the appropriate name of *Cities of the Dead*. The dead, then, have to be borne forth from the city of the living, and consigned to their last resting-place in the fields. To such an abode was the funeral throng carrying one youthful body when the sorrowful procession met the eye of the Saviour, and the wailings of uncontrolled emotion reached his pitying ear. Many, perhaps most, of the inhabitants of the city constituted that melancholy throng; they were discharging those last sad duties of humanity which man can never, without proving untrue to his nature, refuse to his fellow man. They were consigning to his narrow bed a brother, a youthful brother; and there was enough, doubtless, in all the circumstances of his death and burial, to raise in their hearts an unusual flood of sorrow, and make the tears of compassion abundantly flow. That was a woeful and weeping multitude which yielded to the feelings of the sad occasion, and saw in the early departure of a fellow creature, a warning to prepare for their own. But there was one in that multitude, the sorrow of whose heart far exceeded theirs, and could find no utterance in speech, the agony of whose bereavement might well have melted the stoniest heart, and whose whole soul was dissolved with bitterest tears of desolation and woe. It was a widow bereft of her only son; now doubly a widow, seeing she had lost him who was her solace and her joy, the honour of her old age, the sole support of her declining years. He had died before his time, in the flower and promise of his youthful life, just entering on the labours of manhood, and about to become more than ever the stay of his desolate mother. He followed not her to the grave, but she was following him—the parent burying the youthful child, and not the son, as is most natural to *our* minds, burying the aged parent. Every sign and circumstance of woe were here, all that strikes the tenderest cords of our humanity, and makes us pity the for-

lorn condition of a fellow-creature. Here surely was one of the saddest of those scenes of distress and separation which abound in this valley of tears, and which, at all seasons, set death before our eyes, and lacerate the deepest feelings of our nature.

That widow has much people around her to soothe her in her sorrow, and sympathize with her under such a bereavement; but she refuses to be comforted; like Rachel weeping for her children, she lamenteth for her only one, and weepeth because he is not. Can her comforters give back the dead? Can they give the warm colouring of life and health to the pale cheeks, or restore their living lustre to the eyes now closed in the cold slumbers of death? Ah no! they have lifted up her dead son, and are carrying him away; confessing their inability to save, they are bearing the lifeless body to the tomb. But lo! there cometh one who hath power to comfort that poor widow, and to dry her tears; the Lord of life and death, who can make diseases fly before his touch, and even the remorseless grave yield back its dead. He is the lowly Saviour of the world, the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, who can feel her bereavement, and take pity upon her infirmities, who, wherever he goes, spreads around his path the effulgence of divine mercy and love. He hath come to remove the darkness of her sorrow, and restore to her him who was the joy of her heart, and the desire of her eyes; he hath come to show the fulness of his Divine power, and the depth of his Divine compassion; he hath come a blessed messenger of joy and consolation, to gladden the heart of one widow, and to hold out to all those who, in after time, shall be widows indeed, an everlasting promise of comfort and support. And how often hath the same compassionate Saviour, since first he came to the widow of Nain, come to the widowed heart and given peace—come to those who have mourned over their youthful dead, and brought profound consolation—come to those that have wept under the shadow of death, spoken to them with the voice of comfort, and dried all their tears away? For he is ever ready to meet, in the city or in the field, in the secret chamber or in the crowded gate, those who mourn in the anguish of their spirits, and of men can not be comforted. Let one spirit be bruised, he is ready to heal it; let but one wound be made, he is willing tenderly to bind it up; let the inward disease rage with its utmost fury, he is able to drive it back, and substitute for the agonies and pains of our corrupt nature, the health, the vigour, and all the unutterable joys of a spiritual life. O, then, if Christ the Saviour is thus ever at our side, ready to heal our sorrows, to bind up our wounds, and to give us soundness in the midst of corruption and decay; if he is thus always willing to meet us in our distress, to deliver our souls from death, our eyes from tears,

and our feet from falling, it is surely our first and imperative duty to arise and meet him, to stretch forth our hands to him in the extremity of our woe, to raise to him our streaming eyes, and come unto him with all our sorrows. Shall we be guilty of such dark ingratitude, such desperate infatuation, as to turn sullenly away from him who is our greatest friend, who alone can effectually comfort and save us, and who, in the midst of death can give us life? Language cannot describe the folly and awful depravity of him who would repulse the compassionate and life-giving Saviour, and despise, thoughtlessly, or even bitterly despise, his voice of comfort, his healing power, and all his offered mercies. But yet such a character is met with every day. Nay, are there not many more of those around us who reject than who embrace the Saviour—men whom no sorrows can soften, no calamities subdue—who, despising the gift of life, and putting away from them the comfort of the Lord, willingly and hopelessly become the victims of despair, and perish in the darkness of their sins. So desperately wicked, so hardened and depraved is the heart of man!

Verse 13, "And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not." Before she came to Jesus, perhaps even before she saw him, before any intercession by the attendant mourners could be made on her behalf, out of the multitude of his tender mercies, he took compassion upon her. He bent upon that poor widow an eye of pity, before she could look to him with an eye of prayer. He saw her affliction, and determined to relieve her out of it all. Now would he exert his divine power in one mighty miracle of love. He prepares her for the fulness of joy that is to follow, and says to her in a voice of tenderness, in one short but thrilling exclamation of pity, "Weep not." In these words, hope, joy, and consolation are contained. They tell the weeping mother that she shall again embrace her living son. "Weep not, daughter of desolation—dry thy tears—thy son shall live. This is not a time for sadness: the dead shall arise,—the lost shall be found, and herein shall my heavenly Father be glorified. The work that I now shall do, will be a work bearing witness to the glory of God, and a merciful work unto thee; therefore weep not." Such is the strain of that consolation which the Saviour gave, and straightway proceeded to support and justify. Now, as he said unto the widow, so says he unto all believing mourners—"weep not." "Mourn not over your dead like those who have no hope. They may be upon their bier—they may be lying in the grave—but shall they not one day arise? Shall they not again become alive, and walk in newness of immortal life, and be clothed with glory, and never more be taken away from your eyes?" These are the words which the Saviour addresses to all who meet

him by the way, who have faith in his great name, and are melted to obedience; who look to him whom their sins have pierced; who mourn for him as one mourneth for his only son; and are in bitterness, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born. When they are in sorrow, when the darkness of the shadow of death lieth heavily upon their homes, and they weep over one son or daughter, one friend or brother departed, Jesus is at hand, ready to deliver them—ready, with a voice that never fails, to still the tempest of sorrow, and bring a calm over the troubled soul, ever ready to say, “weep not.”

Verses 14, 15. “And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, young man, I say unto thee, arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother.” Jesus, advancing to perform the great miracle, touched the bier whereon the dead was laid, and thereby signified to those who bare it to stand still and witness what he was about to do. He thus gave them an opportunity of showing their faith; for faith was what he usually insisted on when about to exercise his divine power. They so far *did* show their faith, by halting on their way with their melancholy burden; they saw the mighty Jesus of Nazareth stand before them, a man approved of God, and doing all manner of signs and wonders; and they, doubtless, believed that relief of some kind or other was at hand. He had comforted the living mother, and might now gloriously justify that comfort by raising the dead son. A divine majesty, an overpowering yet benignant glance of mercy, a gesture betokening authority and command, all showed themselves in him who stood before them, and awed them into obedience and silent expectation. And now the Saviour put forth his omnipotence—“Young man, I say unto thee, arise.” Wondrous and ineffable union of power and mercy! Glorious display of the attributes and feelings of him who is at once God and man—who is God manifest in the flesh, possessing the supreme perfections of the divine, with all the sinless infirmities of the human nature! “I say unto thee, arise.” In his own name, by his own authority; not in the name and by the authority of another and higher being—for higher there is none—he bids the dead arise; he summons back the departed soul, and commands it to reinhabit its tenement of clay. His disciples wrought their miracles in the name of their master; but he, the Lord of heaven and earth, the author and the giver of life, in whose hands are now the keys of hell and of death, needs no authority to work his mighty wonders; for in him all authority reposes. This almighty Saviour utters the word of power, *Arise!* when lo! “he that was dead sat up, and began to speak.” The pale, breathless body, resuming life at the dread command, suddenly grows warm, stirs upon



the bier, and arises. Once more its eyes beam with the intelligence, and its lips move with the speech, of a living man. The lamented youth recovers from his sleep of death; the lost, the dead is restored. "And he delivered him to his mother." This touching incident, so simply related, and in itself so naturally affecting, was wanting to complete this unrivalled picture of divine compassion and condescension. The Saviour personally, and with tender care, delivers to the mourning mother her reanimated son; he entrusts the joyful office to no other hands, but affectionately discharges it with his own.

And see we not here an emblem and a pledge of what the same compassionate Saviour will perform at the judgment day? Have we not here a blessed assurance that then, then at last, he will restore to many a rejoicing mother her long-lost child; that, putting forth his wondrous power, he shall summon from the tomb, and its long forgotten dust, alike the child and the parent, restoring both to the light and joy of an eternal youth, and carrying them to that glorious land where death and separation shall be utterly unknown. What, then, though now the solemn bier relentlessly carries away, and the grave refuses to give back, the youthful dead? What though the early flower, withered and cut down before its time, blossoms not again in this valley of tears, but moulders to dust in the tomb? There cometh yet an eternal resurrection spring, when that flower shall renew its youth, and be clad in immortal beauty; when, at the sound of the trump of God, the dead shall arise, and, through the power of him who has, for the faithful, vanquished death and purchased life, many long-divided friends shall meet again in joy, and many a happy mother shall receive back from the hands of the Lord her living and undying son.

Verse 16. "And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, that a great prophet is risen up among us; and, that God had visited his people." It was indeed a dread and amazing spectacle which all the multitude beheld; a stretched and stiffened corpse bursting its funeral cerements, sitting up in an erect posture, and restored to the faculty of speech. No visible, laborious means were employed to recall it to life; a word had been spoken by Jesus of Nazareth, who had met the sad procession on the way, and immediately the awful sight presented itself of the dead becoming alive. A solemn reverential fear then fell upon their spirits; they were conscious of the presence and the mighty power of God, and they gave utterance to their feelings in the language of adoration. "They glorified God, saying, that a great Prophet is risen up among us; and that God hath visited his people." They gave to God all the glory of the marvellous work, and believed that from him was come the mighty one who had wrought it; that a great and

long-desired prophet had arisen among them, that in him God had at last visited his people. Those among that throng who truly waited for the consolation of Israel, for the great prophet, like unto Moses, who was to arise, and whom they were to hear, doubtless embraced the Saviour and received his doctrine into their hearts. That Saviour, teaching such heavenly doctrines, and working such transcendent miracles, was to them, indeed, the great Messiah that was to come; and accordingly, in glorifying God, they proclaimed their new conviction, and declared the ancient promises fulfilled. The miracle they had witnessed would therefore be to them as life from the dead, the means of quickening their dead souls, and bringing them alive unto Christ. They saw in it a resistless evidence of him whom their souls had long desired to see, and in whom God, when the fulness of time was come, had visited his people—visited them with a deliverance from their spiritual yoke, with the grace of his pardoning mercy, and the abundant riches of his precious consolation.

And should we not tremble and rejoice to behold the great works of the Lord, the mighty deeds in which he causeth his marvellous grace and almighty power to be known? Should we not at all times be ready to exclaim, “God hath visited his people?” Surely the hand of the Lord is not now stayed, nor his mercy withheld from the children of men, that wondrous deliverances and overpowering miracles of grace are unknown among us. When may it not be believingly and exultingly said, that God hath visited his people? When doth he cease to watch over and defend them; to console them in affliction, and sustain them in danger; to supply them with the riches of his grace, and load them with the varied treasures of his bounty? At all seasons, by night, by day, at morn and eve, he visits them in power, and he visits them in mercy; and ever glorious, wonderful, and full of compassion, are the works of his almighty hand. Yes, God hath visited his people; for a great Prophet hath risen up among us; and for the sake of that great Prophet he visits his people still, defending them from all their enemies, and loading them with spritual benefits. And who is that great prophet? Even he who restored her dead son to the widow of Nain, and by whose mighty power all the dead shall one day rise. Then let us glorify God in him; let us give thanks unto God for his unspeakable gift, and whatever triumphs of grace—whatever miracles of goodness—whatever exhibitions of power we witness or experience, let us, with reverence and godly fear, honour and obey that great prophet, through whom alone we expect and shall one day inherit all things.

We conclude with a passing allusion to one or two consolitary doctrines, deducible from this interesting narrative. And, *firstly*, Is not

this miraculous restoration of the dead, to the functions and all the enjoyments of life, a lively and affecting emblem of the reanimation of the dead soul? Yes, the same irresistible power that summoned the widow's son out of the world of spirits, can infuse the light and joy of spiritual life into the dark, the dead, the disordered, soul of man. We err if we regard not our Saviour's miracles as types or instructive figures of spiritual things. They not only displayed his divine power, and fulfilled the purposes of his ever active benevolence, and thereby proved him to be come from the Father—the long promised Messiah—the only Saviour of the world, but they also exhibited to the enlightened eye, as in lively pictures, the offices he had to perform, with the joys and privileges of his spiritual kingdom. When he cleansed the leper, he typically signified his power to cleanse the leprosy of sin. When he gave sight to the blind, he shewed that he also gave the light of knowledge to the eyes of the understanding. In his feeding the multitude with the bread that perisheth, we see an emblem of his feeding the hungry with the imperishable bread of life! In his casting out devils, have we not a pledge that he can and will destroy the power and the works of the devil? And in his raising the dead to life, have we not as certain a pledge that he hath power to animate and quicken the dead soul? All his miracles, surely, were something more than miracles—something more than mere displays of divine benevolence and power; they were types of spiritual things—embodiments of heavenly doctrine full of rich instruction, as well as indicative of mercy and love. This method of viewing the miracles of our Lord will be found to give them a new interest, a nobler beauty, and a deeper meaning in our eyes; while it leaves their utility and power as evidences untouched, it renders them nearly as instructive as parables themselves. In what more striking manner could the Saviour have manifested his power and his purpose to give spiritual life to the dead soul of man, than by raising the body from its last repose, by saying, with life-giving voice, "Lazarus, come forth?" or "Young man, arise." If his awful voice was indeed the voice of God when it commanded the pale, and stiffened, and decaying body, to arise from the midst of its corruption, and walk forth in all the power and activity of life, surely it is no less divine, and even much more surprisingly glorious when it says to the soul that is dead in trespasses and sins, "Arise," when it sendeth a new tide of spiritual life over its dark and turbulent waters, and from the dull chaos summons into glorious existence all the wonders and beauties of a new creation. O Almighty and wonder-working Saviour, great was thy power, and greater still thy compassion and love, when thou didst restore her dead son to the desolate widow of Nain! but how shall we fittingly praise

and adore thine ineffable goodness and grace in bringing the soul from death unto life—in making the heart that loveth the world love God—in creating anew the sinner lying dead in his trespasses and sins! Do thou meet us by the way, and rouse us from our death-like sleep! O utter thy word of power, and send forth thy life-giving Spirit into our lifeless frames; raise us from the bier of spiritual death; say unto us, “Arise!” Animate our whole frames; make our cold hearts beat with the pulse of a new life, and throb with the emotions of a new love towards thee. Restore our souls again, and may we live to glorify God in thee, to honour thee as the great prophet arisen among us, to feel and adoringly to acknowledge that, in our case, in raising us from the death of sin, God hath visited his people.

*Secondly*, Is not this miracle a pledge and a sign of the general resurrection? Cannot He who raised the widow’s son to life raise up us also at the last day? Will not He come at the end of the world and achieve that mighty work, of which this lesser is so manifest a token? In this raising of the dead, he stands confessed the Lord of Life who can quicken whomsoever he will. Dear to our souls will be this pledge of a future resurrection, if we are already raised from death into a newness of life, for it will also be a pledge of life-eternal. If our souls are quickened and made alive here, the resurrection of our bodies from the grave will be the fulness of our joy; for after the judgment believers go away into heaven, and are for ever with the Lord. But if we are not raised to newness of life in this world, we cannot be raised to eternal life in the next; but we shall be raised to eternal death, to all the darkness and despair of everlasting woe. O then, let us shake off our deadly slumber; let us strive in prayer and in holy exertion, till the bands of our spiritual death are completely broken; let us meet the Saviour by the way, weeping over our sins, and casting ourselves at his feet, that he, of his infinite power and love, may raise us up to new life here, and to unfading glory hereafter.

## S E R M O N C X I.

BELIEVERS CITIZENS OF HEAVEN.

BY THE REV. ALEXANDER COBBAN, RATHEN.

“ For our conversation is in heaven.”—PHILIP. iii. 20.

THE word *conversation* in Scripture signifies *mode of life, conduct*; “ Be ye holy in all manner of conversation,”—in your whole mode of life, (1 Peter i. 15): “ Be thou an example of the believers in conversation”—in life or conduct, (1 Tim. iv. 12). But the word in the original rendered conversation in the text, is not the word so rendered in other places of Scripture. It denotes rather citizenship—community—society. The Apostle is exhorting to holiness of life. “ Brethren,” he says in the 17th verse, “ be ye followers together of me, and mark them which walk so, as ye have us for an ensample.” Then, immediately connected with this, and assigning the reason or ground of the exhortation, is the text, “ For our conversation is in heaven.” You will easily perceive that if you understand *conversation* here to mean mode of life or conduct, it scarcely assigns the reason or ground of the exhortation. But observe how different when you understand it as meaning citizenship—community—society. The idea then meant to be conveyed is, that believers are members of a society, and enjoy the rights of a society, not on earth, but in heaven. They are enrolled citizens of heaven, and therefore they must be exhorted to walk worthy of heaven, as becomes the citizens of such a city, the members of such a society.

The doctrine in the text therefore is, that believers are even here enrolled citizens of heaven. Heaven is not unfrequently compared to a state or city, and its inhabitants said to be enrolled. We find mention made of the Book of Life, in which are written the names of them that are saved; and the Apostle elsewhere speaks of the “ church of the first-born which are written (or enrolled) in heaven.” Keeping this in view, then, let us endeavour to bring out what is implied in this heavenly citizenship.

I. *Heavenly society.* If heaven is the believer's city, then the inhabitants of heaven are the believer's society. They are his fellow-citizens. We are too much accustomed, perhaps, to regard heaven as "the land that is very far off." To some, it is more a shadow than a substance—an imagination than a reality. It is something all future—something with which they do not at present feel that they have much close connexion.

But with believers such should not be the case. Even here, heaven is not that far-off land they are too ready to suppose. They are already enrolled its citizens, and this is not a mere name. They are in very deed citizens of heaven—members of the society of heaven. Their lot may be lowly here; they may be encompassed with trials and afflictions in continual succession, but still they are citizens of heaven. It is a *real* right which they possess—the right of a citizen of heaven. True, their full enjoyment of heaven is all to come; but their *right* to heaven is theirs at present. And is there nothing valuable in the possession of such a right? It brings heaven near to them: it connects them with heaven, and in spite of earthly ties, they feel that the tie that binds them to heaven is a reality.

But heaven is not a mere name; and if the believer is here in reality a citizen of heaven, he has in this a title not to a mere name, nor yet to a mere place. He is brought into connexion not so much with a particular locality as with a particular society. He is a fellow-citizen with all that are already in heaven, only he has not yet arrived in the city. He is on his way to it.

Now, look at the heavenly society among which the believer is at present enrolled. There is, first of all, God the Father—the infinite and incomprehensible God. And the believer is brought into close connexion with him. Once he was far off, but now he is nigh to God—he is of the household of God. Once he was an alien and an enemy, now he is a child. God is his father. The filial relation subsists between God and the believer here. He has received not the spirit of bondage again to fear, but the spirit of adoption, whereby he cries, *Abba, Father.* He is thus brought into the society of God. Despised of men, he is yet a child of God. Scarcely admitted into the society of men, he is in the society of God.

Again, in heaven there is Christ, the beloved Son, the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person. And the believer is brought into his society too. He is united to Christ—he becomes a member of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. He abides in Christ. Christ lives in him, and he in Christ. Christ and he are one. He is related to God by the filial relation. He is related to Christ by the fra-

ternal relation. Christ and he are brothers. "Both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one, for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren."

Again, there is in heaven the Holy Spirit, equal with the Father and the Son. And the believer is brought into his society too. He is *led* by the Spirit, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." He is *taught* by the Spirit, "The anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you; and ye need not that any man teach you, but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth and is no lie; and even as it hath taught you ye shall abide in him." He is helped in prayer by the Spirit, "The Spirit helpeth our infirmities, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit maketh intercession for us, &c." He has the witness of the Spirit, "The Spirit beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." He is sealed by the Spirit, "After that ye believed ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise." Yea, the Spirit dwelleth in him, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" Thus closely is the believer connected with the highest in the heavens. He can no more be said to be a stranger to the Spirit than to the Father and the Son. With all the three he is brought into close connection. All are linked together. All form one society. The believer is a son, and, therefore, an heir—a brother, and, therefore, a joint-heir with Christ—a habitation of the Holy Ghost, and thus sealed and made fit for the heavenly city. Who can doubt that he is among heavenly society?

But, farther, holy angels and the spirits of the just made perfect are part of the society of heaven, and, therefore, part of the believer's society. Holy angels are his brethren—citizens of the same city—members of the same society—enrolled together as sons or children of God. And so also are all the ransomed of the Lord that surround the throne on high. All are one society. And as friend after friend with whom he is linked here in holy brotherhood departs, there is a breaking only of earthly ties; for the tie that bound them together as citizens of heaven is unbroken still. They have gone before to the city, and he is on his way.

And, dear brethren, is not this a marvellous dignity to which believers are raised here? They are citizens of heaven, in a world at enmity to them. Their fathers after the flesh may leave them; but they have another Father, whose watchful eye never slumbers, and whose guardian hand is never withdrawn. Brother in the flesh they may have none, or if they have, his heart may turn cold, or he may meet them with ridicule and reproach for Christ's sake; but they have an elder brother in

heaven, whose heart never cools, and whose faithfulness never fails. And although no friend should be near to speak a word of counsel, or to whisper a word of consolation, they have the counsellor and the comforter within them—the living Spirit dwelling in them. Dear brethren, all this is a reality. And thus it is with those that are citizens of heaven.

II. *Heavenly fellowship.* A person in a strange land does not forget his native country. The friends he most loves are there, and though the wide ocean roll between them and him, he still feels that he is connected with them—still feels that they are his friends—and still holds fellowship with them. He can sit down in his far distant abode, and in imagination carry himself back to the homes and the hearths of his much loved friends in his native land, till all but enjoying their society, he forgets the wide waters that roll between. And the delight with which he lingers over such imaginations, the regularity of his intercourse with his distant friends, and the pleasure with which he receives in return their written communications, all this tells where his country, and his kindred, and his home are.

And just so it is with believers. Heaven is their city, the land which they love, and there are their most loved friends; and it must, therefore, be that they will hold intercourse with heaven. Just as a person in a foreign land shows that his country and his friends are in another land by the correspondence which he keeps up with it, so believers show that they are citizens of heaven by the correspondence or fellowship which they keep up with heaven. Can a child dwell out of his father's house and not hold fellowship with him? Can brother be separated from brother and not seek to draw near by some kind of intercourse? And can there be a citizen of heaven here that does not hold intercourse with heaven?

It must, therefore, be a fact, that since believers are citizens of heaven, they will be distinguished by the intercourse which they hold with heaven. "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Christ Jesus." Just as a person in a strange land seeks to make home nearer by fondly dwelling on its scenes, and keeping up a correspondence with friends there, so the believer, feeling himself here in a strange land and wishing to be home, keeps heaven before him, and seeks to make it nearer by intercourse with it. And that which makes him do so is, that there is his home. When dwelling with wonder and delight on the excellencies of God's nature, his wonder and delight are enhanced by the knowledge that all these excellencies are the excellencies of a Father and a friend. And how can he be but constrained to ask



often when he asks of a Father, and asks in the name of his Elder Brother, and is helped to ask by the Holy Spirit !

Thus great is the privilege and honour conferred on the believer. As it is not a mere name that he receives when he is called a citizen of heaven, so it is not a nominal but a real intercourse which he enjoys with heaven. And here we perceive the secret of that delight which the believer has in the ordinances. By them he holds fellowship with heaven. They are the connecting links between earth and heaven; and were they removed, the believer would have no way of holding intercourse with his home. They lessen the distance between him and heaven. They bring him into the presence of his Father and his Elder Brother; so that not only the man that never prays, and never waits on ordinances, but also the man that prays and waits on ordinances as a formal duty—that has no relish for prayer, no delight in it—gives certain indication that he is not a citizen of heaven. It is not enough, therefore, to ask, Do you pray? But what is the *nature* of your prayers? Do you feel it a privilege, a delight, a refreshing exercise, to pray? Do you feel that you can speak as children to a father? Are your prayers really intercourse with heaven? Do they lift you up above earth? Do they bring you into the presence-chamber of God? And can you delight in them just because they bring you near to God and to heaven? So it is with the citizens of heaven. And never so well as when “in the secret place of the Most High,” yet feeling that he is beside a Father,—when sensible of his wretchedness and unworthiness, yet asking much, and asking with the simplicity and confidence of a child—when Christ gives him confidence, and the Spirit gives him affections and utterance, never so well as then does the believer realize that he is a citizen of heaven.

III. *Heavenly affections.* The city where one has his home is loved. There he has his peculiar rights and privileges—there are the familiar faces and the much loved friends—and there is home. And all these throw around it an air of interest, and make one attached to it in spite of the absence of natural beauty or artificial adornment. It is not so much the beauty of nature or the adornment of art that entwines the affections around it, as the rights and privileges, the familiar faces, the much loved friends, the happy home.

Now, dear brethren, heaven is the believer's city—his home. There he has peculiar rights and privileges; and there are they whom he most loves. It must be, therefore, that his affections will be entwined around it. It will be the city of his affections. It will awaken his love—it will call forth his desires—it will excite his joy. And mark

why : Not so much because of any glory in the place or locality, as because of its rights and privileges, because of the Father, the Elder Brother, the home, that are there. Perhaps we think of heaven too much as a locality. But it were little to the believer in what locality heaven were. His heaven is not a particular locality, but holy rights and privileges, holy society. God, and Christ, and the Spirit, are there—holy angels and glorified saints are there. There the Lamb has all the glory. There all his ransomed ones cast their crowns at his feet, and sing their never ceasing hallelujah. It is this that makes heaven be loved by the believer. To behold the Lamb—to dwell in his light—to stand before the throne—to cast his crown down there—that is the highest aspiration of the believer, and one thing that marks him out as a citizen of heaven.

But heavenly affections are not merely affections called forth by heaven, inasmuch as the objects of the believer's supreme affection are there, but affections of the same kind as those cherished by the inhabitants of heaven. When one is residing for a time in a distant land from his home and his family, not only does home call forth his affections—not only does he feel that there is a tie that binds him to home, which all the lapse of time, and all the mighty waters that roll between, cannot break—but his affections are the same with those of the family at home. They love the same friends—they desire the same things—their hopes and their joys are the same ; and thus it is that the heart of the wanderer in the far distant land just beats in unison with the hearts of those that are at home.

Even so, the believer, here among clouds, and encompassed with infirmity, has affections of the same kind with his brethren in heaven. His love is the same ; not, indeed, of the same *degree* but of the same *kind*. Its object is the same. His desires, too, are the same—to know Christ more, to glorify him more, to be ever with him. His joys, too, are the same, for they are all in the Lord. In one word, the heart of the believer on earth beats in unison with the hearts that surround the throne on high. Dear brethren, is it so with you ? Are your hearts heavenly ? Are they, in some measure, at least, in unison with the hearts that surround the throne ? O ! if they are not, how can you suppose that you are citizens of heaven ?

IV. *A heavenly mode of life.* When one goes to a foreign country, there are several things that mark him out as a stranger, and indicate the land to which he belongs. His speech, for example, is peculiar. So are his habits and manner of life ; for he does not adopt the manners of the place where he is only sojourning for a time.

Just so the believer is a citizen of heaven, and here he is a stranger in a strange land. And as he knows he can be here only a short time, and expects to be soon home, he does not conform to this world. He seeks neither to speak its tongue, nor adopt its mode of living. On the contrary, as he has no wish to tarry here long, he strives to live as much in accordance with heaven as possible. There is something in his speech that savours of heaven without any affectation. Why should a citizen of heaven have nothing to speak about but the things of this fleeting world? Will such conversation fit him for heaven? or will there be any of it when he arrives there? And, in short, must not his whole mode of life be conformed to the rules of heaven? Clearly it must, if you consider two things.

1. *What is implied in being a citizen of heaven.* We have seen that it implies that the believer is enrolled among heavenly society. God is his Father, Christ his Elder Brother, angels and glorified saints are his kindred. Is it possible that the man that claims kindred with these can live a life conformed to the world? Must there not be a powerful inducement to holiness, when he keeps in view the holy city of which he is a citizen, and the holy society of which he is a member? Surely he that calls God his Father, and Christ his Brother, and angels his kindred, must keep himself unspotted from the world. Or, again, he has heavenly fellowship—daily intercourse with God, and the Son, and the Spirit. Now, the society which a man keeps, every one knows, has a mighty influence on his character and conduct. He that keeps company with the noble-minded can scarcely be base-minded. He that keeps company with the pure can scarcely be habitually impure. And the believer, the citizen of heaven, who has daily intercourse with the highest and the holiest, and the noblest society, cannot but feel the influence of this in ennobling and purifying his mind. And the same result must follow from his heavenly affections; for every one knows what an effect the affections have on the conduct. The man whose esteem and love are all reserved for objects mean, and base, and unholy, cannot but live an ignoble and unholy life. It must, therefore, be that the believer, the citizen of heaven, whose affections are the noblest and the holiest that can beat in human breast on this side heaven, will feel the influence of this in making his life heavenly. Dear brethren, are you believers? Then you are citizens of heaven, and you see “what manner of persons you ought to be in all holy conversation and godliness.”

2. *The believer cannot otherwise be fitted for heaven.* It were to no purpose to be made a citizen of heaven at present, if he were not fitted for dwelling in heaven. Could he find admission into heaven without

being fitted for it by being made perfectly holy, he could find no enjoyment in it. Now, it is here that he must be fitted for heaven. It is here that the preparation goes on without which the gates of the city will not open to him. If it is true that he is in reality a citizen of heaven, and that he shall one day "enter in through the gates into the city," then it is equally true that he must of necessity be daily growing in fitness for heaven. He is here in a state of preparation for heaven. This is his great work. And if he has a firm persuasion that he is a citizen of heaven, and that he is to have his eternal home among all that is noble and all that is holy, he must feel constrained to "cleanse himself from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

But we cannot conclude without reminding you that there are some among us strangers to the privileges of which we have been speaking.

1. *There are some amongst us who have not yet been enrolled in heavenly society.* You ask, how can this be known? but the question is not difficult to answer. You would fain call God your Father, and regard yourselves as his children. But how did he become your Father? His word declares that you are by nature his enemies. How, then, was that enmity slain, and how were you reconciled and made children? Look that question in the face. How was this great change wrought? And this may lead you to see that it has not been wrought at all. Can you look back upon a time when you were at enmity to God, and trace the change from enmity to friendship? Alas! you can scarcely say that a *change* has taken place. It has been always the same with you. Now, were men *born* children of God, you might have some reason to think you were his children. But men are born his enemies, and they can become his children only by being begotten again by God—born again by the Spirit. Has this change been wrought in you? Or can you find freedom and delight in intercourse with God? Do you like to be near him? Do you like the thought that his holy eye ever sees you? Can you say that the Spirit of God dwells in you? Do you *believe* that the Spirit dwells in you? Alas! that strangeness to God—that want of delight in his presence—that conscious feeling that whatever change has been wrought in you, the Spirit does not *dwell in you*, are too plain indications that you are yet "far off," unconverted, unsaved!

2. *There are some among us that have no heavenly fellowship.* Heaven is a strange land to them. In this world they feel at home. Are there not among us formalists in prayer, and formalists in waiting on ordinances? They pray indeed, but they have no pleasure in it. They wait on ordinances, but it is all because such is the custom with

most people. They know not what it is to unburden their minds to a Father in heaven, to wrestle, to tarry at the throne of grace. Their prayers are as lifeless as their own souls. And such prayers are not heavenly fellowship. Yea, and must we not go farther? For are there not among us persons that live in the neglect of prayer altogether? They are going down to the pit, yet they will not so much as utter a cry for their perishing souls! There is mercy within their reach, but they will let it be "clean gone for ever," before they open their lips to cry for it! Miserable men! to dream away a day of grace in this manner. What intercourse have you with heaven? And how then can it be your city? And yet you hope! It is a foolish dream. O! prayerless man!—O! prayerless woman!—O! prayerless child! your hope is vain; you are without God, without hope, unconverted, unsaved!

3. *There are some among us that have no heavenly affections.* Say, brethren, where are your hearts? On what are they most set? Is it on God and the things which are at his right hand, or is it on this present world? Alas! the answer is too easy? Seldom or never do your hearts rise to heavenly things. You have no pleasure in thinking on them. You can scarcely desire them. From the beginning of the week to the end, you think of earthly things, and desire earthly things, and love earthly things, and are content with earthly things. Does Jesus draw forth your supreme affections? Do you, with those that surround his throne, desire him above all, and glorify him above all? Alas! you are strangers to all this; and how, then, can you hope for heaven?

4. *There are some among us that do not show a heavenly life.* Look at the iniquity that abounds every where—the intemperance, the deceiving, the evil-speaking, the Sabbath-breaking. These indicate any thing but a heavenly citizenship. But, not to dwell on these, are not the lives of most among us, at best, but negative lives? There is the absence of most that men count great or scandalous offences, but there is no positive heavenliness, abounding fruit, unwearied zeal and activity in the Lord's service. The character must be described rather by what is wanting than by any thing positive. Dear brethren, these things ought not so to be. O! it is full time to awake out of your day-dreams. You cannot be fitted for heaven in that way. Have you *begun* aright in this matter? You cannot be made citizens of heaven without being born again—united to Christ. The title to the heavenly city is *in Christ*.

## S E R M O N C X I I .

THE CHOICE AND CONDUCT OF FELIX, A WARNING TO ANXIOUS SOULS.

BY THE REV. WALTER SMITH, HALF-MORTON.

“ Go thy way for this time ; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.”  
 Acts xxiv. 25.

THESE words were uttered by Felix, in presence of Paul, when he had reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come. In the character of Felix, as unfolded in this book, we find the general features of many men. Their hearts are not altogether steeled against religious impressions. They have some convictions with regard to the necessity of righteousness and temperance, and can be impressed with fear on the prospect of a future judgment ; but having felt the power of the truth, and experienced the movements and stirrings of the Spirit, they will yet say, “ Go thy way for this time ; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.”

Felix was farther advanced than many who are regular, now-a-days, in their attendance upon ordinances. He trembled at Paul’s preaching. There was a power in the preacher’s language that pierced him to the quick. His heart was smitten, but it was not broken. He was touched, but not made contrite. The world had the mastery over the Roman governor still—retained hold on his affections still ; and immediately after the eloquent and faithful admonitions of Paul, immediately after his own trembling in the prospect of judgment, he purposes in his heart to do an unjust act. He would have taken a bribe. He would have pocketed the fruits of venality and corruption—“ Wherefore, he sent for Paul the oftener and communed with him.”

The Bible tells of those who, being made to tremble, did believe, and were saved, as examples for us to follow. We are told, also, of those who resisted the admonitions of conscience, and the authoritative claims of a holy God, as beacons to warn us. Now, we nowhere else in the Word meet with Felix ; we nowhere read of his conversion. There is no evidence furnished us of Felix dying in the faith ; and, for aught we know, the convenient season never arrived. There is too much reason to fear, that this was the turning point in his history ; or rather, the de-

cisive step in the direction of hell. Oh! then, if there is truth in the word of God, if there is a reality in the joys of heaven, if hell is a place full of misery and woe—as the search after happiness is the one great business of your lives, as you value your souls,—shut not your ears against the truth, nor your hearts against its influence, while we endeavour to point out the way to happiness, and while we urge you to avoid the paths which lead to destruction.

We shall endeavour, in this discourse, to show you,

I. The path which men, feeling the movements of the Spirit, like Felix, ought to pursue.

II. The danger, presumption, and sinfulness of such a course as that which Felix pursued.

III. The necessity of your giving heed to the things of your peace now.

I. We shall consider, in a sentence or two, the course which the convicted sinner should pursue. There were three paths before Felix. He might have chosen the way of the infidel—to reject the gospel altogether, or the course he did pursue—namely, to neglect it, to postpone the full consideration of those things of eternal moment, which were pressed upon his attention,—or the full and instant closing with the overtures of salvation. He had the offer of a free pardon, a full acquittal, and a glorious inheritance; but, like Demas, he loved the present world. There is, said conscience, responding to the fervid eloquence of Paul, a reality in the truth; and although he put off its consideration, he desired, like Balaam, “to die the death of the righteous.” The cares of office, and the distractions of business, and the service of the state, occupy and absorb his thoughts. It is not convenient for him now to serve the Lord. If any of you desire to die the death of the righteous, you must live the lives of the righteous too. If death, and judgment, and eternity press heavily upon your minds, you must turn away from all your sins, and give yourselves entirely and unreservedly to the Lord. No other path of salvation can we point out—no other way will lead us to heaven than Christ. And, now, we make a full tender of salvation to your souls—we offer, on the authority of Christ, and as the ambassadors of the Lord, a free pardon. If you desire salvation, come to Christ now, that all your defilement may be washed away. Run not voluntarily the risk of being engulfed in an abyss of misery, and say not with Felix, “Go thy way for this time.” This is the path which the sinner, convinced of sin, which all the trembling Felixes out of hell, should pursue—to repent and break off from all their sins, and close with Christ. And not on the convicted sinner merely do we make this demand, but on all men. On

the authority of heaven's King, we command the most hardened and debased to give themselves to the Lord. "Give glory to the Lord your God, before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains; and while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness."

II. We proceed now, in the second place, to consider the danger, presumption, and sinfulness of the course which Felix pursued.

(1.) Such a course is dangerous. Do you feel that your hearts are not right with God—that all accounts are not settled—that all scores, so to speak, are not cleared? Close with the Saviour now, that all your sins may be blotted out. Nature has certain feelings, certain wants and desires, which require to be satisfied. When you feel hunger, pain makes you seek for food—when you are thirsty, you desire drink. The man would be reckoned a fool and a fanatic, who did not follow up, with suitable exertions, the suggestions of nature, for the permanence and well-being of his corporeal frame. But in spiritual things, this is the path which many pursue. They do not attend to the plain intimations of Scripture, nor the motions of the Spirit, nor the suggestions of conscience, nor the calls of duty, nor the felt longings and wants of the immortal Spirit. There is something else to occupy them in the meantime. The hand finds some other thing to do. The attention is not directed to those things from which the will is estranged.

What is the tendency of this shutting out of the truth from the heart? Manifestly to grieve the Spirit of God—to hurry the soul onwards to that state when the Spirit ceases to strive. There is a gradation in the language of Scripture on this subject. There is a resistance mentioned in many passages, and may be regarded as the lowest order of sinful opposition to the voice of a holy God. When resistance reaches a certain point—when the repeated unsuccessful efforts of supernatural agency have reached a certain limit, the Spirit is grieved. He threatens to depart, and to influence the will and touch the conscience no longer. Man loves his sins more than the truth of God—deliberately prefers what is evil, and the spirit is quenched; and then of him it is said, "Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone." Such is the tendency, the dangerous tendency, of putting off till a more convenient season the closing with Christ. "Acquaint yourselves *now* with God, and be at peace." "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

(2.) In such a course there is manifestly presumption. What can



entitle you or me to postpone the full consideration of the Gospel, and the work of closing with Christ? One of two things is pleaded by man as a reason for turning a deaf ear to the voice of instruction. He neglects the gospel entirely, because he values it not; or he neglects it merely in the meantime, he puts off its consideration till some future and more convenient season. In the first case, in rejecting it altogether, he openly despises the authority of God, and practically says, I will not have the Lord to rule over me. But it is with the putting it off in the meantime that we have principally to do. If he postpone it now, with the purpose of giving heed to its message at some future time, it must be on the supposition of his own power to summon again into existence the religious impressions he formerly had, and to turn his attention to the matters of eternal concernment whensoever he may now choose. The presumption of such a course lies in the idea of salvation's being a work, which, by the exercise of his own strength, he shall be able to effect, and which may be done at any time, by the application of his own skill.

There is manifest presumption also in this conduct, implying, as it does, that we reckon God will be the better for our services, and that he will be glad of us, at what time soever we shall choose to return. The conduct and the language of some men, and the entertainment they give to the truths of the Gospel, impress forcibly upon the mind the conviction that they do not so much deem themselves the party to be damaged, or to be benefited, as they deem God the party who shall sustain loss by their withholding obedience, or be benefited by their giving it. We know not what sounds of gladness and what expressions of delight, shall be uttered over the sighs and tears of a broken-hearted sinner; but notwithstanding all the affectionate earnestness with which God pleads for men to have mercy upon their souls, we know that being infinitely perfect and glorious, He is incapable of any diminution or increase of his essential glory. And be assured if his mercy, and love, and justice, are not glorified in your salvation. His holiness, his justice, and truth, shall be glorified in your condemnation. It is presumption, therefore, for man either to imagine that he will be able to call into existence those feelings and convictions which already he has done his utmost to crush and destroy, or to suppose that God lies under any need of his services, so that He will be glad of them at any time, although he has told us, that if we neglect and despise his entreaties, he will laugh at our calamity, he will mock when our fear cometh. You will never obtain salvation because of your own strength to lay hold thereon, but you will, by feeling your weakness, your insufficiency, your inability to do that which is good, find the sure and beaten track of the

saints of God to a place of peace, of enlargement, and security; for thus you bring your weakness to the strength of Christ, and your emptiness to his fulness, and your guilt to his grace. Will you then say, "Lord save me, I perish!" "God be merciful to me a sinner!" or will you say, "Go thy way this time, and when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee?"

(3.) In the third place, such a postponement is sinful. It is sinful for any man not to serve God. The offence is manifestly aggravated when, as in the case of Felix, the suggestions of the Spirit are disregarded, and the clear intimations of Scripture, brought home to the conscience, are neglected.

The Lord calls upon all men, every where, to repent. The command is given to all men, without exception, to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; and it is at man's peril if he refuse. Now, you hear this command; you acknowledge its paramount obligation; but you put off. To-morrow, or at some future period, you purpose to turn to it your attention. Grant that, in your resolution, you are perfectly sincere; grant, moreover, that you shall be able to give earnest heed, at some future time, to the things which belong to your peace; a very little attention will convince you that such a resolution, or such a future purpose, is not without an element of sinfulness, the effect of which may be to harden your own hearts, and to make God give you up to a reprobate mind.

What is the nature of the demands of God's holy law? Can we be right in regarding merely as a worldly transaction the obedience he requires—that the master will be satisfied if, within a limited time, the servant perform his work, no matter when it be begun. Ah! brethren, there could be no more dangerous delusion than this. There is not one passage in Scripture to sanction one hour's delay. God uniformly urges man to repent *now*—to believe *now*. "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation. To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." God cannot sanction the delay that man would claim; for he cannot so issue his commands as to give or grant a season for the commission of sin, whatever purposes of new obedience, and whatever resolutions of amendment may lie beyond it. We would then have you bear in mind, that the very purpose to become religious, at some future time, is intrinsically and necessarily sinful; for there is, manifestly, a time virtually appropriated to the service of the devil—a time reserved to man in which he may live at a distance from duty and at a distance from God. The purpose of Felix carries, in its face, an unblushing affront to the majesty of God. The obedience which God demands is uniform, perfect, uninterrupted; and not for one moment will he relax the high behests of his law.

If the conduct of Felix involves sin at all, it is sin against light. The path of duty hath been made plain. But the position has not been attained which ought to be striven after, viz., a turning away from all in, in the actings of a lively repentance, and a cleaving to Jesus Christ in the exercise of a lively faith, and a walking along the narrow way which leadeth unto life; because worldly pursuits, and sinful desires, have been allowed to maintain their perverting influence upon the will, and to becloud the intellect. It is a sin against clearer light than the man unconvinced of sin hath yet attained. It is a sin against love,—against a God of love who hath expressed his willingness to be reconciled, who hath plied the conscience with every motive of fear and of love; who hath used every method of argument, persuasion, and entreaty; who hath sent his Spirit to open the eyes, that the path of duty may be discerned; and hath backed these appliances with his own faithful promise, that if the sinner will return unto him, he will return to the sinner. And double woe shall be to that man, who shuts his eye against the light, and closes the avenues of his soul against conviction, and wilfully obliterates the handwriting of the Spirit upon the tablet of his heart.

III. We come now to speak of the necessity of giving heed to the things of your peace now.

The arguments that we have already employed to show the danger, the presumption, and sinfulness of delay, enforce the necessity of embarking on the service of God *now*—of giving your souls to Christ *now*.

Men, after all, imagine, that when death begins to lay his cold clammy hand upon them, they will be compelled, under the pressure of a dire necessity, to believe, and that all will at last be well. But it is folly and madness to rely on the possibility of a death-bed repentance. It may be said, was not the thief on the cross saved, as it were, at the eleventh hour? And is not this a ground of encouragement and hope? It is a ground of great encouragement to see such a manifestation of the fulness and freeness of God's grace. But God could never intend this to affect your relation to sin, so as to allow you to cherish it, and encourage you to persist in it. As if Scripture would guard us against such an inference, fitted to second the devil's efforts, in enslaving the souls of men, no similar instance is recorded.

We many state some additional reasons for the purpose of bringing this home more forcibly to your minds.

(1.) While the great end of the church is the salvation of souls and the glory of God throughout eternity, it serves a subordinate end in the government of this lower world. God has an end in view in all his ar-

rangements. He has a purpose in preserving the fabric of society. It is his ordinary method to call men out of darkness and ignorance to the knowledge of Christ's marvellous light, while they are moving in society, and while their example may tell upon and influence the conduct of their fellow men. Some know the Scriptures from their youth as Timothy did—some are called in the midst of their years—and some there are, although we believe the cases are few, who are called in old age. Now the purpose which the Lord's people serve to the world, is to act as salt, to preserve the mass from putrefaction. The salt may be little in comparison with the lump salted, yet it preserves it from rotteness and decay. It harmonizes, evidently, with the purpose of God, to make his people live for a time on the earth as the lights of the earth, letting their light shine before men, and lightening all around. This is the general rule. There may be exceptions. The Bible tells us of one exception—of one sinner accepted on the point of death. The rule must be followed and not the exception.

(2.) Sanctification is a gradual and progressive work. We must be made holy. We must have a meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light, in order to enjoy that inheritance. Our members, which are upon the earth, must be mortified. Our sins must be crucified. God could make us completely holy at once. But he works by gradual processes. In every department of his work we see progress and advancement. Perfection is attained by slow steps. There is first the bud, then the blossom, then the fruit, and it requires time to mature it and bring it to perfection. And so there are degrees of holiness, and there is growth in grace, till the believer attains the measure of the stature of a perfect man in Christ Jesus.

(3.) If convictions are first to be felt on a death-bed, we shall have reason to suspect them ourselves. We may be goaded on to the performance of some duties by slavish fear. The truth may not be received in the love of it, but in the fear of hell, and God may be served, not because he is an object of love, but an object of terror. If only the terrors of the Lord move the soul, and only the frowns of his countenance make the sinner cry out; if he has no confidence, no trust, no filial affection, what shall be his portion, but the realization of his worst fears, and the fulfilment of his bitterest anticipations?

Yet we call upon all men, in whatever circumstances they may be placed, to repent. Let the young man full of strength, and the man stretched on a bed of sickness, drawing near the gates of death, repent and give themselves to the Lord. What is imperative at all times, cannot be wrong at any time. "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts."

S E R M O N    C X I I I .

D Y I N G   U N T O   T H E   L O R D .

BY THE REV. SAMUEL SMITH, BORGUE.

“ And whether we die, we die unto the Lord.”—ROMANS xiv. 8.

( Preached on the first Sabbath of January 1846. )

I N addressing you from these words, we propose to enquire,

I. What is intended by dying to the Lord ; and

II. By what means we may be prepared for dying to the Lord.

May we be assisted by the Spirit of Truth and Grace in the prosecution of these enquiries.

I. *What is it to die unto the Lord ?*

To die to the Lord, we apprehend, is to have a view to the glory of God in all that pertains to our death.

It is to consult for God's glory, in the state of our views and feelings in the prospect of death.

It is to consult for the honour and glory of God, in the frames of mind and the tenor of conduct which we exhibit during the confinement, the bodily infirmity, langour and sickness—the privation of wonted enjoyments—the trials, the temptations, and the various exercises of preparation which may precede death.

Finally, it is to consult, for God's glory, in the last conflict and struggle that attends the hour of dissolution.

Many persons are at times distressed, even in seasons of health, by the fears of death. It is not to be wondered at that the ungodly should experience this fear. They know not at what moment the hand of death shall be laid upon them, from which no human power can rescue them, and they know not of any place of refuge for the soul when it is separated from this body ; for they know not that Man who is “ a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, and the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.”

It is not wonderful that the ungodly should look at death with terror, should dread the thoughts of appearing unclothed in eternity before a heart-searching God.

But some of God's people, who are fearful in their minds, who are not firmly enough rooted in Christ and stablished in the faith, are also burdened and oppressed with anxiety, and at times with alarm, in looking forward to the time of their change.

It is not to such believers that the words of our text are applicable, for their conduct in this respect is a disparagement to the honour of Christ's work. But they are applicable to those who look forward to death with holy calmness and serenity of mind, who no longer regard it as the king of terrors, and who no longer distrust the sufficiency of Christ's rod and staff then to bear up, and then to comfort people who believed in his name.

The Apostle Paul was an illustrious instance of such holy confidence in the prospect of death. He "counted not his life dear to him, so that he might finish his course with joy, and the ministry which he had received of the Lord Jesus." "I am ready," he says, "not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

And so all such believers as count not their lives dear to them, and are ready, if it shall be in any way for good to Christ's cause, to die when and where it may please the Lord, are in a situation to glorify God. This preparedness, this self-possession and fortitude, gives them an enlargement of spirit in following Christ. They are not made to halt and shrink at every turn, lest they should provoke their adversary to spring forth upon them. If arduous services, which involve the hazard of life, are presented before them, they give a testimony to the power of Christ's religion, by looking death in the face. Christ—they say by their actions—Christ is Lord of all. He hath subdued all my adversaries under his feet—death and the grave have yielded him the victory, and they cannot hurt or injure or distress his saints beyond what Christ permits, and sees to be for their good. The fear of death, therefore, shall not move me, for my life is hid with Christ, and after death I shall appear with him in glory.

But again, and more particularly. To die to the Lord is, by the frame of our mind, and the tenor of our actions, during the sickness and feebleness, and privations of wonted comforts—during the trials and temptations—during the various preparatory exercises which in many instances precede death—we say it is by the frame of our mind, and the tenor of our conduct, in the midst of these, to glorify God.

In many cases, death comes on man slowly. His approach is by silent and almost imperceptible steps. His arrow is sent forth, and

fixes immoveably in some vital part, and he that was pierced by it is sensible of its deadly wound. *Yet*, for a time, the vital functions are but little interrupted, the decay of health and strength is gradual and progressive. Time and space are given for the believer dying to the Lord.

*Here*, my friends, in the deathbed of a believer dying thus by a slow and gradual ebbing away of life, there is scope given for glorifying Christ.

A deathbed brings around you affectionate friends, and relations and neighbours—it solemnizes their minds—it inclines them to thought and reflection—it disposes them to listen with tender heed and attention to any word of counsel you may address to them. However reluctant they may before have been to endure your reproofs, or hear with patience your exhortations, they feel that you now occupy a posture which warrants you to speak with earnestness, and to assume the office of a counsellor.

And a deathbed places you yourself, if you are a follower of Christ, and if negligence and improvidence have not unfitted you for the office, in a situation to speak with effect and with power on Christ's behalf.

Why is this? Because the Christian is then raised in some measure above the world—*severed* from it—and because he is brought in sight of eternity. He sees the world as his no longer. These pleasures are not to be his pleasures—these honours are not to be his honours—this gold and silver, this property in land and houses and merchandise, he will soon leave far, far behind him—so far, that it is lost to his view for ever and for ever.

Therefore he can think of these things, and speak of them in another way than the men whose hands are still soiled, and whose hearts are still encumbered with them.

He sees eternity as his immediate dwelling-place. So soon as the pulse shall cease to throb—so soon as the disease which is now far advanced has run its course, then his spirit takes its flight, and goes to dwell, and dwell for ever, beyond the flood.

It is natural to him to turn his eyes thither. It is natural to him to occupy his mind in considering the occupations of this new home, its joys, its citizens, its king. It is natural to him to ponder well the bonds of association between the believer and the rest which remains for him—to examine attentively the ladder by which fallen man is to climb upwards to the presence of his God. Religion is no more a thing for speculation, and argument, and vain discussion; it is a thing of realities; it is that in which alone the soul has any real concern.

And so it is, brethren, that the deathbed of believers are often

schools of Divine grace and truth. Many good men and pious women are found on their deathbeds to be eminent and successful preachers of righteousness. They rise above the power and weakness of bodily disease—their souls soar upwards with a bold and fervid wing. They scan the Bible with a steady and a penetrating eye—its truths are not only understood, but felt, apprehended, taken up, realized. Ah, what views of Christ are often enjoyed by the dying Christian! They knew him before, but they saw not half the glory, nor half the sacredness, nor half the fulness of grace, and love, and truth, which they discover now. So that, with godly Welsh they are ready to cry out, “Hold thy hand, Lord; it is enough. Thy servant is but a clay vessel, and cannot hold more.” They hold in their hand the telescope of faith; it is not dimmed as it used to be with the world’s breath—and from Pisgah’s top they look upwards to their promised heritage.

These saints are glorifying God in the meditations of their own hearts; they are glorifying him by the patience, and resignation, and other holy graces with which, under bodily suffering, and amidst the harassing temptations of the devil, they endure the chastenings of their Father; but they glorify him also by their testimony. They tell to those around them what great things God hath done, and what great things he is now doing for their souls. They bear witness to the love and faithfulness of Christ. They tell of the warfare they have waged, and the weapons they have fought with; and they honour the name of him who is giving them the victory.

They speak in Christ’s name—they tenderly exhort—they gently reprove, and warn—they affectionately encourage—they hold out the fading hand to heaven, whither they are hasting, and say, this is the land of peace—this is the home of holy, happy rest—follow thither—forsake all and follow Christ. And God often blesses these deathbed labours. Many a Christian will tell you how his mind was solemnized—how his heart was touched and his soul impressed by the conversation of some departing saint. Their serene composure—their look at times of holy joy—their strength amidst weakness—their deep insight into the gospel plan, and the gospel promises—their testimony—their parting admonitions—have been treasured up in their hearts, and have been the means of stirring others up to serious anxiety, to earnest prayer. “Oh, that I might die the death of the righteous!” is now their desire. “Oh, that my latter end might be like his!” Precious, they are persuaded, in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his saints.

Yet further, to die in the Lord is to glorify God amidst the struggle and pain with which death is attended. Some only of God’s saints are privileged thus to give glory to God. In many cases the transition is



of such a nature as to afford little scope for witness-bearing—in many you can only learn what is passing within by the uplifted eye—by the smile which betokens universal peace, or by a *sign*, like that of Bruce, who, as the dimness of death gathered over his eyes, and he could no longer read the open volume he so much loved, caused his fingers to be laid on these words of the apostle, “I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus my Lord.” Yet in his case strength was furnished to confirm this token by words of joyful trust and confidence in God. “Are my fingers now on them,” said he, and, when assured that they were, he addressed himself to his children, saying, “God be with you my children. I have breakfasted with you this morning, and I shall sup with my Lord Jesus Christ this evening;” and so, having shut his eyes, he gave up the ghost.

Times of trial and persecution are the seasons in which God has been most signally glorified amidst the last sufferings of his saints. Stephen saw the heavens open, and beheld the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and thus was strengthened to endure the vindictive rage of his enemies, and to pray that God would not lay their sin to their charge. And the grace that was so manifestly and abundantly vouchsafed to this early martyr, may be regarded as a symbol of the special grace that has been given from on high to multitudes who have subsequently suffered to the death rather than deny their Master.

In most ages of the church there have been multitudes who endured torture, not accepting deliverance; who have had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, of bonds and imprisonments, who were stoned, who were sawn asunder, who were slain by the sword, of whom the world was not worthy. By such a cloud of witnesses God was glorified at the time when they suffered. And the records which remains of their heroic endurance and triumphant testimonies is a medium in succeeding ages through which praise is rendered to the grace and power and goodness of the Lord. Even when offered up on the sacrifice and service of their faith, believers in all ages are, like the Apostle, ready to rejoice. For whilst, with Patrick Hamilton, they confess that the flames by which their bodies are tormented are painful to the flesh and fearful in the judgment of men; yet, with him, they look upon their sufferings as an entrance into that everlasting life which none can enjoy who deny Christ before men. “How long,” was the voice of that expiring martyr, which ascended from the flames, “How long, O Lord, shall darkness

oppress this realm? How long wilt thou suffer the tyranny of men? Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!"

But is our text applicable to all dying believers. "Whether we die we die unto the Lord." May this be spoken in the name of every saint in reference to the views of death which he entertains before-hand, and to his frame of mind on a deathbed, if not to the testimony given forth at the moment of his departure? It cannot be denied, brethren, that there are not a few of those whose interest in Christ could scarcely be questioned, who have *not* so glorified God at death. And it is under this persuasion that we were led to propose, as a second subject of inquiry,

II. *What means should be employed that we may be prepared to die unto the Lord?*

This, then, Christian friends, is the question *now* before us. What measures should we take now while we are in health, and may perhaps have months or years yet to live on earth, that when we shall be smitten by the arrow of death, and laid on a bed of languishing—or, should such be God's will—when the hand of violent persecution is laid upon us, and we are called to suffer for Christ, we may be prepared to render honour and glory to the Lord that bought us with his blood. We see the importance of such a testimony—we are persuaded that Christ well merits it, but how shall we be prepared to render it?

I am not here to show that, in order to our giving witness for Christ at death, we must be *his* people, converted, regenerated, united to God in Christ, justified through faith, interested in the new Covenant. I have reference to the case of believers, and therefore confine myself to those particulars in which believers may be walking more or less consistently, and may be more or less prepared, in circumstances of trial, to approve themselves Christ's.

Would you desire, then, to die unto the Lord? We exhort you, in the *first* place, to enrich your minds with the stores of Divine truth. Acquaint yourselves intimately with Scripture. Lay up its precepts, its promises, its consolatory and cheering testimonies, in your memories. A deathbed needs these supports, and they are then very precious. How often do you hear dying Christians lament the negligence of their youth, and their consequent deficiency in the knowledge of the word of God? And with what comfort and joy do you hear others calling to remembrance the sweet and soothing songs of David, or the lofty and exalted strains in which the prophets described the Branch that was to grow out of the stem of Jesse, and the glories that were to signalize his reign; or the blessed words of our Lord himself after the Spirit of the Lord had anointed him to preach glad tidings to the meek, to proclaim liberty to

the captive, to bind up the broken in heart, and to preach the acceptable year of the Lord? Let this consideration weigh on your mind along with many others as a weighty and impressive argument for a more frequent and attentive perusal of the word of God. The memory in sickness is often enfeebled, the capacity of thinking is impaired, but passages of God's word that have been deeply impressed on your heart, will be then remembered when other things are effaced.

That when you die, you may die unto the Lord, we exhort you, in the *second* place, not to entangle yourself needlessly with the concerns and cares of the world. Many Christians, by erring in this respect, greatly disturb the peace of their dying hours, and impair, so far as their fellow men are concerned, the force and value of their deathbed testimony. They have been immersed in worldly pursuits—they have a hundred interests to consider—a multitude of accounts to settle—a constant succession of calls and claims to answer and to meet; and either these things are neglected to their own discomfort and to the injury of others, or their time and thoughts are so engrossed, and their feeble energies so exhausted, that they cannot attend as they ought to do, and desire to do, to the business of their souls. Let the Christian who wishes well to his soul, and who would die in peace and composure, sit loose to the world and avoid all unnecessary entanglements, "Take no heed," saith our Lord, "saying, what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed. For after all these things do the Gentiles seek, for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

That you may glorify God at death, we exhort you, in the *third* place, to mortify all the evil tempers and corrupt feelings of the natural heart. I allude more particularly to those which men are apt to think comparatively insignificant and harmless, and through which Christians are often in life, but especially in times of sickness, betrayed into much sin and much suffering. A fretful, impatient temper—an excessive concern about personal comforts and indulgencies—a readiness to be discomposed by the apparent neglect of accustomed civilities and attentions—these, and such-like weaknesses, sit ill upon a dying Christian; they mar his own peace of mind, they hinder the growth and exercise of his graces, and they enervate the force of the instructions and advices he gives to those around him. How is this evil to be obviated? By *previous* circumspection and watchfulness; by attending when you are in health and strength to the right ordering of every feeling and temper, and by a rigid abstinence from the undue indulgence of any selfish gratification. The follower of Christ is called to the daily crucifying of

the flesh, with all its affections and lusts, to the constant mortification of sense. He is to put off in every one of its corrupt inclinations the old man, and to put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."

Yet *farther*, that you may glorify God at death, we exhort you to accustom yourselves to just and scriptural notions of its nature. "Oh that men were wise," it is written, "that they understood this, that they would *consider* their latter end." It is profitable for you now, and you will experience the good effects of it in sickness and on a deathbed, to familiarize your mind with the true features of him whose prison-hold you must enter, by whose stroke you must fall.

Consider the *uncertainty* of your dying hour. God hath not informed you nor any one how long he will spare you, or how soon he will remove you. He may come at the first watch, or at the second watch, or at the dawning of the day. We cannot tell what a single hour shall bring forth. Therefore be ye ready, that having your lamps burning, ye may be prepared for the coming of the bridegroom, and may enter with joy to the marriage.

Consider how *near* it is. We know not the exact year or day, but we know the swiftness of time and the shortness of life at its widest span, and we know that God hath appointed us bounds that we cannot pass. If, then, our days are swifter than a post, if they pass away as the swift ships, or as the eagle that hasteth to her prey—if the flower and the fleeting shadow are the proper emblems of the life of man, is it not well that we should realize this truth, and live in the faith of it? Consider the *change* that death produces in reference to this world and its concerns. Fortune and friends are left behind—all earthly undertakings remain uncompleted—all worldly interests are broken up. "The wise men die, likewise the fool and the brutish person perish, and leave their wealth to others, for when he dieth he shall carry nothing away; his glory shall not descend after him." The body itself, for whose gratification we are so careful to provide, goes down to dissolution. "His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth, in that day his very thoughts perish."

Consider its *consequences*. The wicked go down to the pit of destruction, they become the prey of that worm which dieth not, and of that fire which is not quenched; but to the saint of God death is deprived of its sting and the grave of its victory. If our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Through Christ, death is swallowed up in victory. He doth ransom his people from the power of the grave. He doth redeem their souls from death. O death, he hath said, I will

be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction. The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. "Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself took part of the same, that through death he might destroy him that hath the power of death, that is the Devil, and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject unto bondage."

Let these views exercise their just influence over your minds. Put not the thoughts of death away from you as a painful subject of reflection. Consider how near it is, how uncertain the moment of its arrival, how entire its separation from the concerns of time, and how infinitely momentous its results; but look on it as the subject and servant of Christ, obedient to his will, accomplishing his purposes, and, to all that believe in him, deprived of its sting, robbed of its victory. "So teach us," let us pray with the Psalmist, "so teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom."

*Finally*, my Christian friends, if you would glorify your God and Saviour at death, accustom yourselves to lean, with a simple, child-like trust on Christ. The nearness of Christ to the dying man is the great concern. To be able to rest on the beloved, to fix the eye of faith upon him, to come close to his blood-sprinkled mercy-seat, to take hold of his hand, to hear the accents of his voice, to feel his sufficiency, to know that he is grace, and truth, and faithfulness, and strength, and love—this is the dying man's peace, this is his comfort and joy.

It may be that all helps, all accessaries are withdrawn. There may be no wise and kind Christian friend to counsel and encourage—there may be no voice of prayer or of praise raised beside his dying bed—there may be no tender offices of affectionate kindness on the part of relatives and friends—the light of the natural eye may be so dimmed that you cannot trace on the page of God's holy volume the message of eternal life—memory may have begun to fail, so that you can scarcely recall the passages once familiar to your mind; but all this matters little if you have learned to *lean* with singleness and simplicity of heart on the all-sufficient Jesus—if your soul knows what it is to live alone with Christ, to apprehend him, to go out and in with him, to confide itself to him without reserve and without distrust.

"I have no righteousness—I have no goodness—I have no holiness—I have no strength of my own—I am in myself miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked, and in need of all things; but Christ my Lord, my hope—he is wisdom—he is righteousness—he is sanctification—he is redemption, and life everlasting." Is this the language of your soul? Is it your daily work to cast yourself on Christ as a poor helpless sinner, believing

that he is all-sufficient, all-merciful, all-gracious? Are you depending on him in duty—are you holding by him in temptation—are you drinking in grace out of the open fountain to which he invites you? Is Jesus now your all and in all? Nothing but Christ, nothing but Christ—is that the heartfelt language of your souls? Then, dear friends, you need not fear to die; you will meet Christ in the valley, he will wait you there with his rod and staff. Whether you live, you will live unto the Lord, or whether you die, you will die unto the Lord. Whether you live therefore or die, you are the Lord's.

As, on a former occasion, it was our object to show what it is to live to the Lord, so we have now, dear brethren, endeavoured to shew you what is implied in dying to the Lord; and we think you must be satisfied that death, looked at in a large sense as comprehending the anticipations of it beforehand, the time of sickness and decline which usually precedes it, and the solemn circumstances which attend the event itself, forms an occasion well fitted for shewing the glory of God.

We have also endeavoured to shew how we ought to prepare ourselves, in order that, when we come to die, we may die unto the Lord; and we believe you are convinced that preparation for death is an important work, and that it will be for our happiness to give ourselves in earnest to such preparatory exercises as those to which we have referred.

And do you not feel that the circumstances in which we are to-day met in God's house, add impressiveness and urgency to the lessons of our text?

God, in his mercy, has spared us to see the commencement of another year, and hath brought us up in health of body, and amidst the use of many privileges, to praise his blessed name, and to enquire his holy will. But our meeting in such circumstances stirs up thoughts in our bosoms. It raises the enquiry, are all here who met with us formerly—who worshipped with us in public or in private when the twelve months commenced, of which we have just witnessed the close? And it suggests the question, not less solemn, Shall all now met together in health, it may be in vigour and comfort as to this life, and the things of this life—shall all this congregation assemble again in these courts on the first Sabbath of a yet succeeding year? Shall all then occupy their place in the land of Sabbath and of gospel ordinances? We cannot tell. God knoweth. But so far we can judge; it is most probable that, ere this year has closed, some of us now waiting on God in this house on earth shall have gone to reckon with Him for the use we made of our privileges. The winged arrow shall go forth from the quiver of the Almighty, and smite this one and that one, the speaker or

the hearer, the old man with his grey hairs or the child now learning the first principles of the oracles of God.

There will be, it is probable, death-bed scenes with some of us. There will be seasons for testing, and for testifying. An hour is on the wing, we know not how near it is, but we know that it will certainly come, when the world must appear in our eyes, with all its glory, as but vanity, and when to have a hold on the hand of Christ will seem better than ten thousand worlds, with all their enjoyments. We say, then, is not the lesson of our text commended to our thoughts as exceedingly momentous, and are we not desirous that we could say, in the full energy and confidence of the Apostle, "Whether we live, we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord. Living or dying, we are the Lord's?"

What we have, therefore, to ask of you this morning is, that you will take with you this verse of Scripture, that you will pray over it, that you will meditate on it, and that you will make it the *text* of the year—the text of which your life and conversation shall be a commentary and exposition which the world may read, and which the Searcher of Hearts may read and approve. Let the language of your hearts be even now such as this, Whether I live, suppose God shall spare me, I shall, by his grace, live to the Lord. I will set God before me; I will consider all the obligations I lie under to his grace. I will use the talents he hath committed to me for himself, ever seeking his direction, and counsel, and assistance, in the employment of them. This, by his grace, I will do, God helping me and sparing me. Whatever I have done in time past, this year I am resolved that I will live to him, who is Lord of the living; or whether I die, as, peradventure, ere the year shall close, God may ordain, I will seek in my death, in all the circumstances attendant upon it, and connected with it, to die to him who is Lord of the dying. And that I may so glorify God at death, I will seek to be prepared for its coming. I will look forward to it—study its character—look at it as the gospel declares it. I will consider what it is to them that are out of Christ, and consider what it is to them that are in Christ. I will gird up my loins, and keep them girded. I will trim my lamp, and keep it daily and nightly trimmed. I will hold by him who is the Lord of life. I will hide myself under the covert of *his* wings, who hath deprived death of its sting, and who will put a word into my tongue, and enable me to say, "O death, where is thy sting—O grave, where is thy victory?"

Tell me, Christian hearer, is this the purpose and resolution which you have now formed? Will you begin the year by thus giving yourself to God? Will you, in good earnest, and without reserva-

tion, make God's glory *now*, during the year you have begun, the principle, the end, the rule of your life? Yes, you reply, as God may enable us. Persevere, then—abide in Christ—keep near to him—wait on him—humbly, patiently, constantly, confidently, thankfully, and he will not forsake you. “He will guide you with his eye.” He will enlighten you, and strengthen you, and uphold you, and refresh you, and restore your soul by his Spirit, and at death his rod and his staff shall sustain and comfort you. You will live the life of the righteous, and you will die their death.



## S E R M O N CXIV.

THE PARABLE OF THE BARREN FIG-TREE.

BY THE REV. ROBERT INGLIS, EDZELL.

“ He spake also this parable. A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard: and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none: cut it down: why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering, said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well; and if not then after that thou shalt cut it down.”—LUKE xiii. 6-9.

ALL the parables of our Saviour are full of instruction, and intended to make us acquainted with some great truth “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” (2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.) In the most persuasive and winning manner they arrest the attention, and thus fix in our memories some useful information which we might not otherwise acquire. Our Saviour frequently used this method of giving instruction, and we should endeavour to ascertain the object he had in view, or the instruction he meant to convey, when he delivered these attractive and beautiful lessons of divine truth. In that one which forms the subject of our present meditations the preceding context shews us that while God, through the intercession of our Lord Jesus Christ, is still sparing us that we may become fruitful, yet, unless we repent, we shall all perish.

“ He spake also this parable: A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none.” (v. 6.) The Lord Jehovah is frequently represented in Scripture as the Lord of a vineyard, as in this parable, in that of the labourers in the vineyard (Matt. xx. 1-16), and in that (Matt. xxi. 33-39), where “a certain householder is represented as planting a vineyard and letting it out to husbandmen, after which he went into a far country; and when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen that they might receive the fruit of it. But they took his servants and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. And last of all, when he had sent his son, saying, they will reverence him, these wicked husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir, come let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him.” This shews the treatment which

the prophets and other servants of God received from an ungodly world, while the latter part of it was literally accomplished in the crucifixion of our Saviour without the gates of the city. In the fifth chapter of Isaiah, the prophet represents the Lord Jehovah as the proprietor of a vineyard, and states what great care he had bestowed upon it; but because it was unfruitful, or fruitful only in wild grapes, in briars and thorns, it was to be laid waste.

From these Scriptures it is evident that the "certain man" spoken of in this parable is the Lord of hosts, who chose the children of Israel from among all the nations of the earth that they might be his vineyard. They were the vine which he brought out of Egypt; he did cast out the heathen out of the land of Canaan and planted it, he prepared room before it, he caused it to take deep root, and it filled the land, (Ps. lxxx. 8, 9.) "A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard." The fig-tree in its native country yields two crops of ripe fruit in the course of twelve months. The fruit which makes its appearance in the autumn of one year ripens early in the summer of the next; and the fruit which appears in the spring ripens in the following autumn. No tree is more easily increased than the common fig. In the spring, young shoots are produced in abundance, which do not ripen fruit that year, but if their growth is stopped by cutting off the top as soon as they are a few inches long, they will produce other fruit in the autumn of the next year. The reason of this remark will afterwards appear. From the large size of their leaves, fig-trees afford a very pleasant shade, and the prophet Micah represents one's sitting under them as an emblem of security and peace. "They shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig-tree, and none shall make them afraid, for the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it. (Micah iv. 4.) The fruit of fig-trees makes its appearance before the leaves, and consequently, as St Mark informs us, when our Saviour saw a fig-tree afar off having leaves, he came to it, expecting to find fruit thereon. According to the common course of nature, it was probable that some early figs would be upon it, but it was barren, and he found nothing but leaves. (Mark xi. 13.) Now the fig-tree mentioned in the parable was planted in a vineyard—in ground of the best quality and under the highest degree of cultivation—planted in good soil, with a convenient exposure—protected by a wall or a hedge—kept free from weeds and every thing that might hinder its growth and fruitfulness—nourished not only by the dews of heaven, but also, when necessary, by artificial irrigation. That certain man to whom it belonged was at much trouble and expense with it. Instead of allowing it to stand by the way side, or exposed in the open fields, he had it transplanted to a place where it could be properly cared for. And when he

had taken all this pains about it, "he came and sought fruit thereon and found none." It was unworthy of all the care and trouble he had expended upon it. Surely he had reason to expect fruit; for what could have been done more for it that he had not done?—and under this expectation he did not send, but came himself that he might have the pleasure of plucking the fruit; he was desirous that he might see its abundant fruitfulness with his own eyes; "and he sought fruit thereon and found none." His most sanguine expectations were disappointed; there was not a single fig; "he found none." It perhaps was full of leaves, and had a fair appearance, and from the treatment it had received it was to be expected that some fruit would be found upon it; but its leaves concealed its barrenness, its appearance was a deception, and the good treatment it had received was so much labour lost.

Now, as by the "certain man" is meant the Lord of hosts, so by the fig-tree we may understand the Jewish nation, which the Lord transplanted out of Egypt into the land of Canaan; and when he sought fruit among them he found none, for when our Saviour came unto his own, his own received him not. But though this parable was originally addressed to the Jews, and primarily refers to them, it is equally applicable to all those who now enjoy the privileges of the Gospel, and produce no fruit. The visible church of God in every age and in every nation is the vineyard which he hath separated from the world, and inclosed and hedged about. We are fig-trees who may be said to be planted in this vineyard by our baptism—we are admitted into the visible church, and have a name and a place among her members—the ordinances of religion are dispensed among us in their genuine purity and simplicity; and, like the fig-tree in the parable, there are many on whom, if the Lord of the vineyard were to come seeking fruit, he would find none. Although they have been planted in the vineyard, the garden of the Lord, and the vine-dressers, the ministers of the Gospel, have been diligent in the cultivation of them, and have spared no pains to make them, by the blessing of God, fruitful in good works, still they are barren, producing plenty of leaves—blossoms also, it may be—but no fruit. But let us proceed with the parable. We have seen that the owner of the fig-tree, when he came seeking fruit upon it, found none; and we read at the seventh verse, "Then said he unto the dressers of his vineyard, Behold these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree and find none; cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground." By the dresser of the vineyard we may understand our Lord Jesus Christ, who urgently entreated the nation of the Jews to flee from the wrath to come, and to bring forth fruits meet for repentance. "These three years," saith the Lord of the vineyard, "I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree." God is

merciful and gracious, long suffering and slow to wrath, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin. In the antedeluvian age of the world, his long-suffering waited 120 years in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing. (1 Pet. iii. 20.) And he delayed to execute his vengeance upon the cities of the Plain till the cry of their horrible sins had ascended up to heaven. The Jewish nation had often provoked him to jealousy, but they also were spared till the cup of their iniquities was filled to the brim. In the parable three years are mentioned. Some suppose that our Saviour here alludes to the time of his own ministry, the third year of which had now nearly expired, and yet there was little or no appearance of fruit among them. Others think that he refers to three periods of time, one of which was before they were carried captive into Babylon, another after they returned from captivity, and a third beginning with the preaching of John the Baptist, and continuing during the ministry of our Lord himself. Now, we understand the three years to comprehend the whole of the Jewish dispensation; and it is not because *that* may be divided into three periods of time that the phrase "three years" was employed by our Saviour, but because, comparing the Jewish nation to a fig-tree, he follows out the comparison in this respect, that the fig-tree only bears fruit, as we observed before, upon the third year after it is transplanted. The first year it is merely put into the ground; the second year its top is broken off to make it productive; and, in the spring of the third year, it is expected to produce its first crop of fruit.

But there is no necessity for limiting the words of our Saviour, as even this interpretation would seem to do, for the three years just mean the appointed time, however long or however short it might be, which God had allowed the Jewish nation to bring forth fruits meet for repentance, before the sceptre should depart from Judah and their polity should be destroyed. And though this parable was originally addressed to the Jews, and describes their condition in a very striking manner, yet it may also be applied to men in every age, and is designed for the awakening of all who enjoy the means of grace. It exhibits a law observed in the dispensations of providence and the administrations of grace which should overwhelm with terror all who possess spiritual privileges without improving them.

Every man has a certain time of probation allotted to him, wherein he is required to work the work of him who sent him, and to abound in the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God the Father. There is a time to every purpose under the heaven, and to us *now* is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation, now is the time for making our calling and election sure—now, while

the Spirit of God is striving with us, and we may have access to the fountain of mercy. If we remain ignorant of the day of our merciful visitation—if we despise the riches of God's grace—if we persevere in our alienation from him, and obstinately continue in sin—the advantages which we now possess will be taken away from us, our day of grace will be at an end—the utmost term of God's patience will be expired—the Holy Spirit grieved, will be provoked to depart and will strive no longer with us—we will be given over to a reprobate mind, and our hearts being hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, it will be impossible to renew us to repentance, seeing we will have crucified to ourselves the Son of God afresh, and have put him to an open shame. The length of time that has been allowed us to produce fruit while we still continue barren, is too probable an indication that we will never bring forth fruit; and as the owner of the vineyard said of the fig-tree, "Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground," so there is reason to fear it will be said of us, "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness, there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth." The unfruitful vineyard was condemned, so that the rain from heaven should not fall upon it—its hedge was broken down, so that the wild beasts of the forest might destroy it—and the unfruitful trees that it contained were rooted out, withered, and cast into the fire, that they might be consumed. The fig-tree was not only barren, but a "cumberer of the ground." It occupied that place in the vineyard which was intended for a fruitful tree, and therefore it was necessary it should be removed. So, also, those who are unfruitful in the Church of Christ will be removed, and their place supplied by those who shall bring forth their fruit in the season thereof.

"And he," the dresser of the vineyard, "answering, said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it. And if it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down," v. 8, 9. We have here the intercession of the vine-dresser in behalf of the barren fig-tree. Not only is the Lord Jehovah long-suffering and slow to wrath, but we have also an advocate and an intercessor with him—one who has a fellow-feeling of our infirmities, for while he was here on earth, he was tempted on all points like as we are, yet without sin—one who, therefore, can have compassion on the ignorant, and them that are out of the way, seeing that he also was compassed with infirmity. But the dresser of the vineyard, although he made intercession for the fig-tree, did not petition that it should *never* be destroyed. Although he bears long with the unfruitfulness of his professing followers, yet a time will come when he shall be provoked with their delay, and cease any longer to make intercession for them. "Lord,

let it alone *this year also*—let it alone for some time longer. I only petition for a short time, but it is a sufficient time to see whether it will bear fruit or not. The Jews were often warned of the punishment that would overtake them if they continued impenitent and unfruitful, notwithstanding all the advantages with which they had been favoured; and in this parable the mercy of God in sparing them upon the intercession of his own Son, is beautifully set forth. They were now under the care of the Lord Jesus Christ, the dresser of the vineyard, and he petitions that God would give them a farther time of trial—that he would lengthen out their probation a little longer, and see if they would be improved, and become fruitful under his own personal ministry, and that of his Apostles. And he hints to them that if this failed—if this additional time and these additional means for their improvement failed to produce the desired effect—if they continued impenitent and unfruitful under these last and best means, no more pains should be taken with them, but they should be utterly destroyed, and that without remedy. “Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it.” Although the fig-tree was planted in a vineyard, and thus favoured with many advantages of soil, situation, shelter, culture, and protection, so that it should have been fruitful without any other means to make it so, yet the vine-dresser was willing to bestow more labour upon it, and petitioned the Lord of the vineyard that it might be allowed to stand another year, when he would use all means that he could think of to make it fruitful—he would dig about it, prune away some of the large roots, and slacken the earth about the tender fibres—he would also dung it—when turning over the earth, he would apply to its roots that manure which ought to nourish and make it fruitful. “And then,” he says, “if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.” He was willing to try what could be done with it one year more—he thought it very probable, that by a little additional culture and paying a little more attention to it, it might still be productive—“if it bear fruit, well.” The labour bestowed upon it will not be lost—the patience shewn unto it will be approved of, and it will be well that it was spared; but if not, “then after that *thou* shalt cut it down.” If all these means prove ineffectual—if it still continue unfruitful—it is fit for nothing but the fire—yet, let not *my* hand be upon it. I have interceded for it—I have been at much pains about it—I would have rejoiced to see it bearing fruit—even yet I cannot put forth my hand against it; but it is a cumberer of the ground—its appearance is disgraceful in the vineyard—its presence is injurious to the fruitful trees—the attentions lavished upon it will be much more agreeably and profitably bestowed upon them, and therefore “*thou* shalt cut it down.”

We acknowledge the justice and the propriety of all this that is done, or is proposed to be done, to the fig-tree, and we now remind you that the fig-tree too truly and too faithfully represents many among ourselves—the forbearance that has been shewn us, the means that have been used to make us fruitful, and our final destruction, if after all we remain impenitent and unproductive. God truly is long-suffering to usward, not willing that any of us should perish, but rather that we should turn from the evil of our ways and live. Unto us, as unto Israel of old, his uniform language is, “Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways, for why will ye die. I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, neither of him who dies, saith the Lord: wherefore turn yourselves and live ye.” Though we have long continued unfruitful, or fruitful only in wickedness, yet the time of our probation is mercifully lengthened out, but “we have despised the richness of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering,” not knowing that “the goodness of God should lead us to repentance.” (Rom. ii. 4.) Surely it is of his mercies that we are not consumed—it is because the dresser of the vineyard, the Lord Jesus Christ, is still continuing to make intercession for us—because his compassions flow and fail not—and because he is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us. He has also used every mean to make us fruitful in works of faith and labours of love. He has given us line upon line, and precept upon precept, here a little and there a little. He not only intercedes that we should be spared a little longer, but he increases the means of grace and opportunities of improvement—his Spirit strives more urgently—his word is made more quick and powerful in its application—it comes home with more energy to our hearts, and our consciences alarm us more frequently and more forcibly with the fear of condemnation. Yet, though these means have been used for *three years*, and are used still, we may reject them all as many do, and become hardened in iniquity—we may refuse to give admission to Jesus, though he stand at the door and knock. We may resist the Spirit, though he would strive with us—we may stifle conviction, though it would force itself upon us—the word may be read and heard, but not being mixed with faith in them who hear, it will only be as water which has been spilt upon the ground and cannot be gathered up again. Conscience may continue to sound an alarm, but its voice will be drowned in the noisy clamour of dissipation and riot, till at last it will cease to accuse, however criminal or careless our conduct may be, because it will have become seared as with a hot iron. In such circumstances, nothing can await us but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation to devour the adversaries.

You will recollect the vine-dresser did not request that the barren fig-tree should be spared *altogether*. It was only for a limited time that he asked indulgence for it. "Lord, let it alone *this year* also." So, likewise, with the unfruitful professors of Christianity, the Lord Jesus Christ may say, "Lord, let them alone for *this year* also," or for a certain limited time; but he will not request that they should be allowed to continue in their trespasses. God has borne long with them—upon the intercession of our Saviour he may yet bear with them a little longer; but his Spirit will not always strive with man—a sufficient time will be allowed them, and, if they bear fruit, well—it will be well for them in time and well for them in eternity; but if not, then when that time is expired, they shall be cut down. God shall speak to them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. "Because I have called and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then they shall call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me." (Proverbs i. 24-28.)

The instructions conveyed by this parable are very obvious. It is surely reasonable that those who are placed in the Church, with all the advantages of religious means and ordinances, should bring forth fruit unto God; yet, alas! how many are there in such favoured situations who still remain unprofitable "cumberers of the ground," and therefore liable to be cut down as displeasing unto God, the master of the vineyard? Through the intercession of the vine-dresser, our Lord Jesus Christ, he may be graciously pleased to delay his threatened vengeance; but the time of his patience is limited, for he will not always strive with man; and if repeated warnings and admonitions will produce no good effect upon them, the stroke of his justice will fall, and they shall feel the weight of his indignation. From this parable, then, in the

*First* place, we see the forbearance of God manifested to barren fig-trees, fruitless professors, through the intercession of our Lord Jesus Christ; and there are some such in every congregation. By our baptism we were early planted in the vineyard—we had much care bestowed upon us—much instruction given unto us—many privileges conferred upon us, and many means used with us to make us fruitful unto good works. The Lord of the vineyard hath come frequently looking for



fruit, and upon many of us he has found none. The profession of some has been hypocritical—the blossoms which appeared upon others promising abundance of fruit, have been blasted by the frosts of ingratitude and selfishness, or scorched by the lusts of sensuality and intemperance; and the leaves in some others, instead of concealing the fruit, have only concealed their covetousness and worldliness. This is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation. But blessed be God, though this may be the case with some, it is not the case with all. Yet I would remind you it is by no means improbable that this is the case with those who are least willing to allow it; and it is only through the forbearance of God that they have not been cut down as cumberers of the ground, and that their candlestick has not been removed out of its place.

In the *second* place, advert to the *time* mentioned in the parable. The owner of the vineyard says, “these *three* years I come seeking fruit and find none.” Three years ago\* we listened to the voice of conscience and the call of God, and separated ourselves from the Established Church because of “*interference* with conscience, the *dishonour* done to Christ’s crown, and the *rejection* of his sole and supreme authority as King in his church.” These are the concluding words of our unanswered and unanswerable protest—the *last* words uttered by Dr Welsh, now gone to his rest, in the Assembly of the Establishment—words of solemn meaning—words that ought to be prayerfully pondered by all who still remain in the Establishment. Three years ago we asserted Christ’s right to rule supreme in his own house, and maintained the spiritual independence of his people. Three years ago, as members of the Free Church of Scotland, we left what we then considered, and still consider an enthralled church, and met as a free congregation at the manse door. The fig-trees were full of leaves then, there was also a goodly appearance of blossom. The trees are not less numerous now, they seem to be as full of leaves as ever, and there is yet no lack of blossoms, but what has become of the fruit? Ah, there has been little in comparison of what there might have been, and little in comparison with what there ought to have been! Yet for what there has been we would give God the glory; and if it be that the love of some has waxed cold, is it not the case also that there has been fruit where little was then expected? At the intercession of the vine-dresser, the Lord Jesus Christ, those who are yet unfruitful may get a farther trial of *another* year. “They may be let alone this year also,” and if they bear fruit it will be well. The vine-dresser will have pleasure

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\* Preached at Edzell Free Church, evening 14th June 1846.

and cause for rejoicing, for he shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied; and the owner of the vineyard will also be pleased to find fruit where he formerly only found leaves. As for the tree itself, it will be well for it; it shall not be cut down, but receive blessing from God; it shall be purged that it may bring forth more fruit; and at last it shall be transplanted from the vineyard on earth to the paradise above, to flourish for ever in the courts of God's house.

In the *third* place, this parable teaches us that though God bear long, he will not bear always with unfruitful professors; the time will come when they shall be cut down as cumberers of the ground. His justice will not long be trifled with, and his long-suffering, and forbearance, and patience will come to an end. The vine-dresser interceding for the fig-tree, said, "Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it; and if it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down." Through the intercession of our Lord Jesus Christ they who are yet unfruitful may be spared for some time, and more means may be used with them; and if after that they still continue barren, he will cease to intercede for them. That additional time which was given, and the additional means which were used for their benefit, will then only aggravate their condemnation, and it will be more tolerable in the day of judgment for Sodom and Gomorrhah than for them. I beseech all such who now hear me to be no longer faithless but believing, and to bring forth fruits meet for repentance. I beseech you, by the forbearance of God, by his long-suffering kindness and tender mercy—by the intercession of our Lord and Saviour—by the assurance that God will not always strive with man, and that the Saviour will not always intercede for impenitent, unfruitful, professors—by every fear of hell which can arouse unthinking sinners from their dreadful lethargy, and awaken them to see the awful danger of their situation—by every hope of heaven which can stimulate their endeavours for the attainment of it—by all the invitations of mercy that are addressed to them in the word of God—by all that Christ did, and taught, and suffered to save sinners—and by the striving of the Holy Spirit—Oh, I beseech you to flee from the wrath to come. "Now, then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." (2 Cor. v. 20.) May God give testimony to the word of his grace, and render it effective for the conviction and conversion of sinners, and for the sanctification of believers. Amen.

## SERMON CXV.

CHRIST DESTROYS THE BELIEVER'S FEARS.

BY THE RÈV. G. PHILIP, STONEHAVEN.

"And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last. I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death."—REV. i. 17, 18.

(Preached after the celebration of the Lord's Supper.)

THE subject of the text is a remedy prescribed by Christ for certain fears which had sprung up in the mind of his Apostle. The occasion of these fears was (as we find by the context), a sight of the glory of Christ in his state of exaltation.

This is a sight which *all* believers behold on earth. There are two ways in which it may be beheld. *First*, by the eye of the body. John was now beholding it with his eye, and this to him was but a following up of those sights which he had all along had of Christ in his state of humiliation. With the eye of the body he had gazed upon the Man of Sorrows—with the same eye he was now gazing upon the Lord of Glory. But, *secondly*, this sight may be beheld by the eye of the regenerated soul. Believers look at it with this eye. They are the temple of the Spirit of God; and, speaking of that Spirit, Christ says, "He shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine and shall shew it unto you." But the Spirit glorifies and exhibits a *full* Christ—Christ risen, as well as Christ dead; Christ wearing his mediatorial crown, as well as Christ suspended on the cross.

This sight of Christ exalted which believers now have is as real and distinct as any of their other sights of Christ, and, as in John's case, is but a following up of these.

It is with the eye of the soul they behold him on the cross bearing their iniquities, and bringing in for them an everlasting righteousness; it is with the same eye they behold him as he sits with them at his table, and it is also with the same eye that they "see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God."

Believers, you should practise your eye with this sight. To-day it has been long and earnestly fixed on the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world, let it now gaze for a little on the glory of that Lamb in the kingdom of his Father. What though fears spring up at

the sight ! If you, like John, shall tremble, like John, also, you may be encouraged and emboldened by the very voice of Him at whom you quail. It was not fitting that John should be always leaning on the bosom of the Man of Sorrows: he was now on the very threshold of a state where he would for ever be gazing on Jesus crowned with glory and honour ; it was fitting therefore that his eye should be partially opened on earth to the overpowering splendour of the scene which was so soon to burst upon his view. And, children of God, it is not fitting that you, who are already treading the very outcourts of the palace of the great king, should be always reclining beneath that banner of love which rests over the memorials of a crucified Jesus. The Lord is not here, he is risen, he is gone into heaven, and is at the right hand of God, and already the prayer which he has presented for you is hastening to be answered, " Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me."

What, then, are your feelings as you gaze on the glory of your exalted Lord ? Like John, when you see him, do you fall at his feet as dead ? And is the language of feelings which you have no power to express, such as fell from the mouth of Isaiah when he beheld the same glory, " Woe is me for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, for mine eyes have seen the king, the Lord of hosts ?" Behold, Jesus is laying his right hand upon you, and hark what he is saying, " Fear not, I am the first and the last. I am he that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, Amen ; and have the keys of hell and of death."

Now let us look at the comfort which these words are calculated to impart. And this we may do by considering,

(I.) Who it is that prescribes the remedy for your fears. It is Jesus who lays his right hand upon you, saying unto you, " Fear not ;" and by examining,

(II.) The remedy in its several parts, " I am the first and the last. I am he that liveth, and was dead ; and behold I am alive for evermore, Amen ; and have the keys of hell and of death."

I. Consider that it is Jesus himself who prescribes the remedy. *He* lays his right hand upon you. *He* says unto you, " fear not."

This might well be ranked among the parts of the remedy, for like many other remedies the value of this one consists greatly in the hand that administers it. If I have offended a friend, his own simple assurance of forgiveness is worth a thousand arguments from others who would wish to convince me that he is no longer offended. Were a person of whom you stood greatly in dread to preserve the closest silence regarding you, although you should on all hands be pressed with reasons

to show that your fears were groundless ; reasons, too, which he was willing should be employed, would you not feel as if there were something ominous in the mysterious silence which he himself preserved, and that ere the reasons could tell with all their effect upon your mind, that silence must be broken by an assurance of his love ?

The same principle will hold in the case of Christ and his people. "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine." The very voice of Christ should operate as a charm on his people. There should be something heart-stirring in the words, "Fear not," as uttered by him, altogether independent of reasons for the banishment of fears.

Faint-hearted believers, be of good courage, then. Not only are there reasons why your fears should be calmed—reasons, too, which Christ is willing should be brought to bear upon you for this purpose, but he himself, so far from standing aloof in mysterious silence, is laying his right hand upon you, and with that voice which you have before obeyed, is saying unto you, "Fear not."

It is not by arguments devised by men that you are called on to look up in hope and confidence. It is by an entreaty coming to yourself fresh from the mouth of Him before whom you tremble. And oh, when it is He himself that bids you not fear, does not the very glory with which he is encircled bring encouragement to your heart? Do you not feel that you may safely lay aside your fears, when all the terrors of His majesty are arrayed, not against you, but on your behalf? And if, in addition, you not only hear the sound of the voice of your exalted Lord, but that voice urging reasons why all your fears should be dispelled; and if, in the urging of these reasons, you can hear the silver tones of infinite and everlasting love, and behold the Lamb of God blended with the Lion of the tribe of Judah, do you not feel your soul reviving, yea, strengthened within you, at the very sight of the glory of Jesus at the right hand of God ?

II. We come now as proposed, *secondly*, to examine the remedy in its several parts. Christ not only bids his people fear not, but he urges reasons why they should not. These reasons are contained in the several parts of the remedy. Let us take up these, then, in their order.

And 1st, "I am the first and the last, I am he that liveth," or, as it might be rendered, "I am the living one."

Several ideas are comprehended under these expressions: Christ existing from everlasting to everlasting—Christ the author and end of all things—Christ their sum and substance. The epithets are, you perceive, expressive of his Godhead. The others which he assumes in

the text have respect to his humanity. How beautifully they all unite to dispel the fears of his people! Some of these fears are to be chased away by his Godhead, some by his humanity; to chase away all, Christ speaks both as God and as man.

But let us now try the power of this first part of the remedy. What are your fears, then, child of God, as you look upon the glory of Christ? Is this one of them, that it is impossible that he could be caring for and loving so insignificant and dead-hearted a creature as you? But whose voice is this? "Fear not, for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine." Is this another of your fears, that you have such a heart that you will never be able to obtain fitness for beholding Christ's glory in eternity? But who says this? "Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? There is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint, and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint." Is this another, that your efforts to make known Christ's glory to others will fail? Hark, who speaks! "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness."

Your fears, whatever they are, may be removed. The First, the Last, and the Living One must be able for the task, and He is willing. Did a past eternity require to be searched ere your peace could be fully established, Jesus would still say to you, "Fear not," for he is from everlasting. Did a stream of spiritual life require to be struck out from some flinty heart, Jesus would still say, "Fear not," for he himself is the Living One. And at the moment of your deepest despondings, and when the sighs of ten thousand fainting hearts like your own are ascending before him, conscious though he is that each one of his people must be presented faultless before the throne, he still whispers to you, "Fear not," for "in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."

The *second* part of the remedy embraces the words, "I was dead."

In how striking a contrast this part stands to the last! The glory of the Deity is now shaded by the darkness of a human grave. But what an amount of comfort this part is calculated to afford; for, if Christ was dead, why should you fear to approach the throne of grace on which he now sits. He whose face you look upon when you bend the knee, once "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, and being found

in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Christ cannot but rejoice in seeing angels approach him; but when he beholds you approaching him, his eye must single you out from the myriads of adoring hosts as one of the very same clime and family as himself, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh.

But, again. If Christ was dead, why should you, who are one with him, fear the punishment of your sins? That punishment is all past already. The wages of sin is death. Yes, that is irreversible, and the gospel does not alter it. But it tells us of two ways in which the penalty of sins may be discharged. Your sins may lie either upon you or upon Christ. Lying upon you, they have their punishment exhausted only with the everlasting death of your soul; lying upon Christ, they have their punishment exhausted with the death of his body. But is not this your very claim as a believer, that Jehovah hath laid your sins upon Christ? Then their punishment must be all exhausted, if only that be a true sentence, "I was dead." The groans of Christ in the garden of Gethsemane brought the punishment of your sins infinitely nearer a close, than the wailings of the lost will bring the punishment of theirs, even after myriads of the ages of eternity shall have rolled; and the last breath of Christ terminated the punishment of your sins as really as the punishment of the lost would be terminated, could eternity come to an end.

And still farther. If Christ was dead, why should you fear to die? Perhaps you are among those who, through fear of death, are subject to bondage. Then Christ died to deliver you from this fear. Say, what would seem most likely to assuage it? Suppose you were required to undertake alone some difficult and dangerous navigation. What would then be best calculated to allay your fears? Would it not be some friend coming and offering to accompany you? And suppose it should turn out that he had made the passage before in tempestuous weather, and knew where the sunken rocks lay, and how to guide the quivering vessel through the raging flood, would you not feel as if new life had been communicated to you, and as if you might safely exchange your fears for confidence and joy. Then Jesus has promised to be waiting you on the eternal shore. Do you fear, then, the last conflict with Satan—he has encountered it; the last agony—he has suffered it; the last breath—he has given it; the narrow house—he has been laid in it. Oh, when he who was dead says, "Fear not;" while you have the assurance from his own lips that after the hardest experience of death, after ransacking every corner of death's domains, there is nothing for you to fear, strive to be able to say, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me."

But let us now proceed to notice the *third* part of the remedy, "Behold I am alive for evermore, Amen."

This part is another strange contrast to the last, another brilliant evolution of the character of your exalted Lord. The darkness of a human grave is now dispelled by the light of immortality. This light should dissipate the gloom which overhangs the grave of the believer. The time of the greatest degradation of his body stands close on the time of its highest exaltation. The very degradation to which it is doomed makes its exaltation the greater astonishment. "I was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore." This language will be yours on the morning of the resurrection, "for if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised. But now is Christ risen from the dead and become the first fruits of them that slept."

Well, but mark the contrast between the body which believers now have and that which they shall receive at the resurrection. Of the one it will yet be possible to be said, "I was dead!" of the other it will be true, "Behold I am alive for evermore." The one may be spent, the other cannot be spent, it can only be employed in the service of Christ. "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." This you can do only for a short time, and if the body which you now have must be wasted into the grave in some service or another, what though your arm shall never cease from its labours till it be stiffened by the grasp of death; what though your body shall find its first undisturbed repose in that place where "the weary are at rest"—you shall be clothed with an house which is from heaven, and the very wearing out of your earthly tabernacle in the service of Christ will enshrine you hereafter in a nobler immortality.

But the thought that Christ is alive for evermore should not only scatter the gloom which overhangs the grave of believers, but should also assure them of the perpetuity of that spiritual life with which Christ hath quickened them.

Let us take the case of a person embarking for a foreign land to whom you entrust all your property. How great would be your anxiety to know that he had arrived in safety and was well! But suppose that it were possible for you to entrust him with your very life, so that his death would be your death-knell, how intense must your anxiety become!

What must be your anxiety then, believer, for you have done nothing less than give up your very life to Christ! Your "life is hid with Christ in God." Your life then is far away, and if he with whom your life is hid shall cease to live, the knell of eternal death is rung for you. Was it not rash, then, to trust your life so far away from you? Hark! a voice from the land where it is, "Fear not, I am the Living One, and behold I



am alive for evermore." "I am the vine, ye are the branches." All is still right with the vine. It is still shooting up an everlasting plant in the paradise of God. Its branches, therefore, whether reaching through heaven or downwards to earth, must still be flourishing. "Because I live ye shall live also."

See that you reverse not this. The root is in heaven, the branches are on earth. It is not when you have spiritual life, or because you have it, that Christ lives; you live because, and so long as he lives. And how long is that? Evermore. In old age, therefore, when others are fading, you shall be flourishing, and at the very time when death seems to hold you in secure possession, from your cold tomb shall the voice be heard, "When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory." And oh! because Christ is thus alive for evermore, if you have followed one to the grave a single spark of whose life lies hid with Christ, then sorrow not as those who have no hope; that spark is indestructible as Christ. Where Christ is there it must be; where Christ goes there it must follow, first to the judgment seat and then to the mansions of eternal day.

The *fourth* and last part of the remedy is contained in the words, "and have the keys of hell and of death."

By the term hell, we are here, as in several other places, to understand the state of souls between death and the resurrection. At death, there is a separation not only from friends and the world, but even from your very self. The body goes one way, the soul another; and yet their union is necessary for the complete existence and happiness of brethren of the man Christ Jesus. It is by the same door that they separate, but it is by different doors they return for their eternal union.

Christ has the keys of all these doors. He has the key of the door by which the body and soul of his people separate. You cannot die, therefore, till Christ with his own hand open the door, the last breath is the turning of the lock. What serenity this should shed around the death-bed of the believer, and how strong consolation it should impart to those who are left behind! Perhaps you have stood by the dying couch of one dear to you and dear to Jesus. Your heart was ready to sink within you as you gazed on the uplifted eye which told that the unequal strife would soon be over, and pressed the hand cold already with the dew from the valley of death. But even in that hour of agony did not God become the strength of your heart when you thought that the hand of Jesus was there, and that, when the closed door hid your friend from your view, it was Jesus who had shut him in?

But Christ has also the keys of the doors by which the souls and bodies of believers pass to each other for an eternal union. If saints on earth "groan within themselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemp-

tion of their body"—if their souls, even when inhabiting their earthly tabernacle, "do groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with their house which is from heaven"—what must be the longings of these souls as the winter of death advances to its close, and the time of the redemption of their bodies draws nigh! How impatient for the sound of the trump of God! That trump shall sound and wake the slumberer in the deepest grave. But who shall unlock the portals of the grave that the body may go forth? "I have the keys of hell and of death." "I will ransom them from the power of the grave, I will redeem them from death. O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction."

And now, children of God, you have been conducted by your Lord along the pathway you have to tread below, and led through the valley of death, the cavern of the grave and the land of spirits, to that full weight of glory which shall be yours at the resurrection. Every step you have taken has been gladdened by the voice of Christ. Where you have placed fears he has set promises, omnipotent for their remedy.

But though your soul has on trembling wing crossed the valley of death and seen terrors beyond, whatever fears you may have to encounter on earth, the last will vanish at the moment of your dissolution. Shall, then, that voice whose living power will, as you pass from earth, spread an eternal calm over your soul—shall that voice be unable to dissipate the fears by which you overshadow your brief pilgrimage below? Shall that voice, which, when sent through the unseen world, will cause your heart to vibrate with eternal joy, be unable when sent downward to earth to lift your soul up to rejoicing in hope of the glory of God?

But to conclude. Christ does *not* speak in the language of the text to those who *will* not come unto him. Impenitent sinners have *every* thing to fear. The attributes of Christ conspire to crush them. "*How* shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" He who is the First, the Last, and the Living One against us! Who *can* be for us? He who was dead our enemy!—His shed blood trodden under foot will ever cry for vengeance. He who is alive for evermore our foe!—The worm of his anger will not die, the fire of his wrath cannot be quenched. He who hath the keys of hell and of death our Judge!—Deep and dark as the cavern may be into which a soul without God, set free from its earthly tenement, shall be thrust, there will be a deeper and a darker cavern still in which it must eternally lie, when its partner, in unrepented sin, shall be brought up from the prison of death that it may be its partner too in everlasting woe.

## SERMON CXVI.

THE UNIVERSAL DOMINION OF CHRIST, THE FOUNDATION OF THE COMMISSION  
WHICH HIS MINISTERS RECEIVE, AND HIS PROMISED PRESENCE  
THEIR ENCOURAGEMENT IN FULFILLING IT.

BY THE REV. ROBERT M'INDOE, GALSTON,  
(LATE OF KIRKALDY.)

“ And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth, Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” Amen.—MATT. xxviii. 18-20.

(Preached at the opening of the Provincial Synod of Fife, shortly before the Disruption.)

THE Divine authority of our Saviour's mission, and the acceptance of his finished work by his heavenly Father, are demonstrated in Scripture by most satisfactory proofs. Prior to his incarnation, our attention is specially called to his person and work by Jehovah himself. He is his servant and elect—his servant whom he upholds, and his elect in whom his soul delighteth—he was to bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. At his birth, the celestial messenger who communicated the glad tidings, was surrounded with a multitude of his compatriots, and Bethlehem's plains resounded with the melody of heaven. And, at the Saviour's baptism and transfiguration, the Divine testimony was given in the most glorious manner. The heavens were opened to make known the fact—the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape, like a dove, upon him, and a voice from the excellent glory proclaimed, “ This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him.”

But there are other proofs to satisfy us that the Lord is well pleased for his righteousness sake. Towards the close of his suffering life, in answer to the Saviour's request, “ Father, glorify thy name,” there came a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. His resurrection from the dead demonstrates most clearly that his sacrifice was accepted. When the revolving skies had brought the third, the appointed day, he burst the barriers of the tomb asunder, because it was impossible that he could be held by them; and he arose a victorious conqueror over death and the grave. His ascension to heaven, likewise, fully proves the same momentous truth. By the terms of that ordinance under which he was placed, he could not be

acquitted unless he paid the uttermost farthing of our debt. But thousands of angels, and acclamations of praise, loudly proclaim that this has been discharged. The gates of the celestial city were commanded by God to lift up their heads, and the everlasting doors were unfolded that the King of glory might enter in. "God is gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises." The passage before us, indeed, containing the Saviour's commission to his disciples, and the promise of his gracious presence with them to the end of time, assures us of the fact, for Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

In discoursing farther from this text I shall, as assisted of God, consider,

I. That power and authority with which Christ, as the Head of the Church, is here invested.

II. The commission given to his ministers in virtue of this power. And

III. The encouragement afforded them in the execution of this commission.

I. Let us consider, in the *first* place, the universal dominion of Christ here asserted. *All power*, says he, is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

The word *power*, in our language, is *ambiguous*: that is, it may be employed with different significations. Sometimes it signifies *ability* or *capacity*, and sometimes, also, *rightful authority*. We might quote many passages in which the term is used in these various ways; but one only shall suffice, that we may have an example of it in both acceptations. In the first epistle to the Corinthians, xv. 24, the original word, which in our text is rendered *power*, is with equal propriety translated *authority*. "Then cometh the end when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule, and all *authority* and *power*." Now, in both these senses it is true of Christ. He has at once the ability to act and the authority to warrant his acting. It is in the latter of these significations, however, that the word is employed in the passage which I am now explaining. It signifies rightful authority! Nay, we must confine it here to this meaning, especially when we bear in mind, that in

the Greek language there are *two* distinct words to denote these different ideas. While it is here meant, then, of authority, it must at the same time be remembered, that God would never commit all authority into the hands of one who had not *ability* and *capacity* rightly to exercise it.

Having made these preliminary observations, I remark more particularly,

1. That, as a Divine person, the Saviour has all power *inherent in himself*. We may prove this by shewing that he is God, equal with the Father. The same titles and attributes are ascribed to both. He is the mighty God, and the true God—the everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace. We may prove it by the Saviour's own express declarations. I, says he, and my Father are one—one in substance, one in will, one in operation. Before Abraham was, I am, the self-existing, the independent Jehovah. "As the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself, and, as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom he will." We may prove it by the mighty works which the Saviour performed in virtue of his essential as well as delegated authority. The apostles wrought miracles in the Saviour's name, but Christ did so in his own name. The blind received their sight, the lame walked, the lepers were cleansed, the deaf heard, the dead were raised up, and the poor had the gospel preached unto them. He thus bears the names, claims the honours, and exercises the prerogatives of Deity. "In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."

2. In virtue of office, the power here spoken of is *delegated* to Christ. All power is *given* unto him in heaven and in earth. On this point, how unequivocal is the assertion of the Most High himself! "I have set my king upon my holy hill of Sion." How explicit the acknowledgment on the part of the Son! "All things are delivered to me of my Father." And how full and satisfactory is the declaration of the Holy Spirit, by the mouth of the Apostle! "He hath set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the Church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all!" As to the *reason* of this fact, we would state, that all power is given unto Christ in the way of *honorary reward*. "He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name!" And, while it is in virtue of his office that this power is *given* to him, many branches of it clearly imply that the

Saviour is a *Divine person*, or God as well as man. He is constituted the judge of the universe. He intercedes for his people with God in heaven. He gives office-bearers to the Church, and he invests with their commission all his ministers. It is the will of God that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father: and all the house of Israel are to know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, who was crucified, both Lord and Christ!

3. This power and authority extend to *universal nature*. It is all power, both in heaven and in earth. More comprehensive expressions, to denote the universality of it, could not be employed, for heaven and earth comprehend all things. The Saviour has power over all *inanimate objects*—he created them, and by him they still consist. He has power over all the *irrational creation*—"all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field, the fowl of the air, the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas." He has power over all the *intelligent creatures* that exist. Other systems than our own may encircle other suns—they may be inhabited by other orders of rational beings—but, get us worlds where you please, the Lord Jesus Christ is ruler there! He has power over all the *spirits in the invisible world*, for "by him were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist; and he is the head of the body, the Church; who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence!"

4. This power is deposited in Christ as the *Head of the Church*, and to be exercised *for her benefit*. It is in his mediatorial character that the Saviour is the Head of the Church, or, as Immanuel, God in our nature. He was clothed in our nature when he made this assertion respecting his universal power, and, in our nature, he will be the bond of union and communion between God and the redeemed, world without end! In this character, he is at once *Head of the Church* and head *over all things to the Church*. He is the Head of *existence* to the Church. He created, purchased, and organised it. It is a Divine institution, deriving its being from God, and not from human legislation. The judges of the land may call the Church the mere creature of statute—they may assert that it was created by the State—devised, formed, moulded, instituted, and created, wholly and of new, by the State. But it is not a mere voluntary society, and it cannot be created or constituted by civil decrees and acts of Parliament. It is founded by Christ himself upon the rock of ages, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. He is her head of *authority*, issuing forth laws for

the regulation of her affairs—the immediate fountain and sole dispenser of the power and authority which are exercised in the Church by its office-bearers. “The Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king, and he will save us!” He is her head of *vital influences*, or the source of all her gracious supplies. It hath pleased the Father that in Christ should all fulness dwell; and, from him, all the body, by joints and bands, having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God. He is Head *over all things to the Church*. He renders every thing subservient to the advancement of her interests. Statesmen may think it of the greatest importance that the spiritual authority of the Church shall be restrained, and made subordinate to Parliament. But even “*kings shall be her nursing fathers, and their queens her nursing mothers.*” Yea, *all kings shall fall down before her exalted Head, all nations shall serve him. “The Highest himself shall establish her!”*

5. This power shall be exercised *in the destruction of all who do not submit to it*. It is in virtue of this power that the Saviour binds kings in chains and princes in fetters of iron, that he suffers no man to do his people wrong; yea, that he reproves kings for their sake. The kings of the earth may set themselves, and the rulers may take counsel together against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder and cast away their cords from us. He that sits in heaven shall laugh, the Lord shall have them in derision. The plowers may plow upon our back, they may make long their furrows. The Lord is righteous, he shall cut asunder the cords of the wicked. “Christ must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet.”

II. Our *second* head of discourse was to consider the commission given by Christ to his ministers in virtue of that power with which he is invested. Here I would remark,

1. That it is only *to those who are called by God, and qualified for his service*, that this commission is given. It was the disciples of Christ that were here addressed, and it is only in so far as ministers are connected with him, and commissioned by him, that they are to be obeyed. The government of the church pertains exclusively to the office-bearers whom he has set over it. Ecclesiastical persons, alone, therefore, as being the representatives of Christ in his church, can confer this power. The magistrate has no spiritual jurisdiction in the church. He has no authority to promulgate laws, or to appoint office-bearers, or to determine causes within that sacred enclosure. If this authority is taken away by competent church judicatories, no secular court can restore it. Yet, such a power has been claimed in the present day! The civil authority, which has rightful authority in its own place over men's tem-

poral affairs, has gone out of its place. It has given orders in Christ's house and kingdom which is his church. To all who are destitute of this commission, the solemn statement of the Most High may be addressed, "I sent them not, nor commanded them, therefore they shall not profit this people at all." And to every one who usurps his sacred authority, the pungent reproof, the overwhelming rebuke applies, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye?"

2. This commission extends to *all nations*, as regards the persons to be benefited by it. While there are some who erroneously say that Christ died for all men, and that all shall be saved by what he hath done, there are others who confine the offers of the gospel only to a few. Both are equally unscriptural. We are to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. Its calls and invitations are free, unfettered, and unlimited! The language in which they uniformly run is this, "To you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men." "Look unto me and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth, for I am God, and besides me there is none else." All adventitious circumstances are disregarded. The shivering Icelander and the sun-burnt Moor are included in the call? With Christ Jesus both Greek and Jew, Barbarian, Scythian, bond and free, male and female, are all one, and he is not ashamed to call them brethren. The rich man in gay clothing and the poor man in vile raiment are on the same level! Lazarus in his rags and in his sores is equally well pleasing with Solomon on the throne in all his glory! Wherever we find a human being, beneath whatever load of woe he may be bending, we may invite him to the Saviour that he may obtain sympathy and relief. He was manifested to take away sin—his blood cleanseth from all sin—and he taketh away the sin of the world! "Thou art worthy to take the book and to open the seals thereof, for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation."

3. This commission embraces *all that the Saviour has made known in his word*. We are to teach all things, whatsoever he has commanded. The duty of Christian ministers as here declared is *two-fold*. They are to *preach the word*, or declare the whole counsel of God. And they are to *administer the Sacraments* of baptism and the Lord's Supper, regulating their conduct in both matters according to the pattern shewn in the mount of God's holy word. How comprehensive, my brethren, is the commission which the ministers of religion thus receive! They must state from the Scriptures the truth of the Divine existence, and the perfections and attributes which are essential to it—they must point out the exercise of these perfections in the works of redemption and providence, and especially in the work of redemption—they must declare the unity of the Deity as subsisting in a trinity of persons



to whom the same splendid titles are applied, and by whom the same mighty operations are performed—and they must exhibit, as the grand centre of attraction and foundation of our hope, that salvation which Christ accomplished on the cross, when he suffered the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God. The gospel is a system of mercy to the guilty, of holiness for the impure, and of comfort and consolation under all the afflictions of life. It comprehends our duty to God, to our neighbour, and to ourselves. It embraces practice as well as faith—duty as well as privilege! It is no new law as some persons foolishly imagine. The terms of salvation are no easier now than under the former dispensation—the standard of morality is not lowered—the wrath of God is still revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men—and the Saviour himself assures us that it is vain we call him Lord, Lord, if we do not the things which he requires! The faithful servant of God, then, must keep nothing back that is profitable to the hearers. He must teach publicly and from house to house—he must preach the preaching that God shall bid him—and, taking his stand in the courts of the Lord's house, he must speak unto all the people that come to worship in the Lord's house all the words that He has commanded him to speak unto them; and, while life and vigour last, he must not diminish a word!

III. We are now, in the *third* place, to consider the encouragement afforded to the ambassadors of Christ in the discharge of their duty. This is set forth here under two particulars.

1. Christ is with his church and people always. Essentially considered, the Saviour is *omnipresent*. We cannot go from his Spirit. It is not his *essential* presence, then, but his *gracious* presence that is here particularly promised. He walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks—he communicates his full and free favour—his divine love and grace, to all his true people. He is sometimes, also, *sensibly present*—our hearts burn within us while he opens to us the Scriptures. Yea, he is often *powerfully present*, making a people willing in the day of his power, and ruling in the midst of his enemies. He is present for *guidance and direction*. The Lord will keep the feet of his saints! Present for *counsel* in perplexity—for *assistance* in duty—for *protection* in danger—present to *contend with those who oppose us*—and present to *overcome* every opposition to our success! Mountains will melt away—difficulties will diminish as we advance—the light of heaven will settle on our path—and the arm of omnipotence will invigorate all our efforts! “My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

2. There is a particular call given here to notice this truth. “Lo! I

am with you alway." This is a note of *attention*, and intimates that the subject is worthy of our regard. Do not overlook the fact, fix your own faith on it, and point it out to others. It is a note of *assurance*. Faithful is he who hath said it, who also will do it. And it is a note of *comfort and consolation*, he will never leave us nor forsake us. Take then, my brethren, the consolation which is here furnished; and let the word, and the promise, and the oath of the Most High be your security for the whole! "The mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee."

In conclusion. My Christian friends, how highly is our glorious Redeemer as Mediator exalted! He receives the homage of universal nature. Every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, was heard saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever! Ascribe ye, then, to him the glory that is his due. Esteem the high privileges with which you are favoured—beware of trusting to mere external advantages—and, cultivating all the graces of the Holy Spirit—aspiring after greater measures of grace, and advancing from strength to strength and from one degree of spiritual attainment unto another, you will in due time appear before God perfect in the Zion above—an entrance shall be ministered to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Fellow sinners, remember that through Jesus is still preached unto you the forgiveness of sins! He is not willing that ye should perish, but rather that ye should turn unto him and live. In heaven he is adored! In hell he is feared! On earth, on earth alone, shall he be disobeyed? O bow, we entreat you, to the sceptre of redeeming grace! Turn unto the strong hold while ye are prisoners of hope! If his wrath is kindled but a little, blessed are all they that put their trust in him!

Reverend Fathers and Brethren, how important and how responsible is the office of the holy ministry! It should never be viewed but in connection with Christ. All power, says he, is given unto me; go ye, *therefore*, and teach all nations. Has this connection been at all times maintained by those who have managed the affairs of our church? Alas no! The prerogatives of Christ have been *usurped* by some, and they have been basely *betrayed* and *surrendered* by others! That power which Jesus as the only King and Head of the church has committed to ecclesiastical persons, has been grasped and exercised by *civil functionaries*; and those privileges which inalienably belong to the Christian people have been conferred on parties who have no visible connection with him! Is this, reverend Fathers and

Brethren, is this a state of matters that should be submitted to without remonstrance, far less, is it to be upheld and desired? Civil courts may straitly threaten us and command us not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But, whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto them more than unto God, judge ye! We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

As a minister of Christ, I deem it my duty to testify against every encroachment upon his royal prerogatives. And, as a successor of the first seceders, permitted by the terms of our re-union with the Established Church, I count it my privilege to carry their testimony *within* its pale, and to seek the redress of all such intolerable grievances! I will not trust myself, however, on such delicate ground. I will employ the language of one who lived and died within the communion of the National Church. "What evil is there," said he, "which the providence of God has not overruled for good? Arsenic is occasionally useful as a medicine, and the same storm which has sunk one vessel has hurried another into port! But are poison and tempests to be ranked among the bounties of Providence? And though *patronage* has rendered some service to religion, is it therefore good, and in itself a blessing? No! It has darkened the horizon of our Church, and is raising around her the fury of the tempest! *Out* with the devoted thing, and your gallant vessel will ride in safety. But cling a little longer to what has gathered around you these stormy elements, and down you go, and you carry all on board to the bottom!"

Has this commission, "Go ye and teach all nations," been duly fulfilled! Let the neglected population of our overgrown rural parishes tell! Let the practical heathenism of our large towns and cities declare! Let the dark places of the earth, which are full of the habitations of horrid cruelty, proclaim that it has *not*! The commission itself has been long known to the members of the Church. They have had the means of carrying it extensively into effect. Millions of their fellow-creatures have been passing into eternity, age after age, unsaved. But their talent, meanwhile, if not hid in a napkin, has been multiplied chiefly for their own use! "If this be innocence, what is guilt? If this be venial negligence, what is aggravated criminality? It is a sin which exceeds all computation!" That servant who knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. And, if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned—if the sword come and take any person from among them—he is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood will be required at the watchman's hand!

Has sufficient attention been paid to the *minuteness* of the command

in our text? Have we taught men to observe *all things* whatsoever the Saviour has commanded us? We are afraid not! "Too much is said, even in the Christian world, about things indifferent and non-essentials. Custom has given a sort of sanctity to the expressions, and a spurious kind of charity, widely different from that which rejoiceth in the truth, has made it almost sacrilege to question whether any thing should be regarded as indifferent and non-essential, which either has the stamp of Divine authority on the one hand, or, on the other, no better sanctions than those of human ingenuity, policy, or expediency! But it is high time to withstand the practice of writing in golden characters, and holding up to the admiration of our liberal and sceptical age, these newly-invented phrases and sentiments, which, if weighed in the balances of the sanctuary, are found utterly deficient in real solidity and value. Toleration and liberty of private judgment are the dearest rights of men, but to call evil good, and good evil, to put darkness for light, and light for darkness, bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter, forms no part of the love we owe to our neighbour. If any man seem to be contentious in favour of that laxity of sentiment which allows these neutralising epithets to be affixed to matters of religious faith or practice, we have no such custom, neither had the apostles nor the Church of God in their day!"

We are persuaded, however, brethren, better things of you. The Saviour has counted you faithful, putting you into the ministry. We desire, therefore, that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end! "Take heed unto the ministry which ye have received in the Lord, that ye fulfil it." Contend earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints. Be valiant for truth. Cultivate the qualities which, under God, may fit you to combat the errors of the present day. "You may have use, yet, for all your polemic skill, and all your power of enduring hardship. The crowning victory is yet to be gained! But be animated with the assurance, that he that endureth to the end shall be saved." The encouragement which the text affords is very great. The Saviour leads on his faithful followers, and stands by them in the conflict. His presence animates their exertions, and secures their ultimate success! We shall be more than conquerors through him that loved us. They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord: forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." Amen and amen.

## LECTURE XV.

BY THE REV. JOHN M'FARLAN, MONKTON.

"Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God cast thyself down: for it is written, he shall give his angels charge concerning thee, and on their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, it is written again, thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."—MATT. iv. 5.

WE have seen mountain paths, on the one side of which there is a deep quagmire, and on the other side a precipice: paths in which, if we step to the right hand, we are most surely bemired, and if to the left, we are in danger of being dashed to pieces; and such are the paths by which God is pleased to lead his people. Let them turn to the right, and they fall into unbelief—to the left, and they are guilty of presumption. Let them proceed straight onward, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left, and they are safe. But then there is a most subtle tempter who besets them on every side, and by his devices would turn them aside from the right way. The mountain path perhaps is rough and difficult, while on the quagmire there is grassy verdure, which tempts us to leave the solid path, and venture on its treacherous surface. And so with Satan's temptations. Sometimes the people of God encounter sore trials and discouragements, which they think to avoid by a small sacrifice, as it seems, of principle, in place of meeting them as they ought in the strength of God; and thus they fall into a mire of unbelief. Sometimes, on the other hand, adventurous travellers, trusting too much to the strength of their heads, and the firmness of their footing, venture too near the brink of the precipice, and miserably perish. And so, also, in spiritual things. There is a sin called presumption, which consists in thrusting ourselves, uncalled, into circumstances of trial and danger, and then trusting that God will deliver us. This was Peter's sin. He made choice for himself of a post of imminent danger, a situation in which Satan might have occasion to tempt him, through concern for his own safety, to deny his Lord; he ventured into the very palace of the High Priest, and God suffered him, for our warning, to fall. Let us beware, then, of these two extremes, presumption on the one side, and unbelief on the other. Let us remember that "*narrow is the way that leadeth unto life.*"

Looking back on the first of these temptations, we find, that in it Satan tempted the Redeemer to *unbelief*, to distrust God, and provide bread for himself. But now his next temptation is to *presumption*—as if the cunning tempter judged, that recoiling from the quagmire, our Lord would the more readily incline toward the precipice. It is often that we, poor weak sinners, in avoiding one extreme, fall into another. If a man is not a spendthrift, not unfrequently is he a miser—not a profligate, why, then, he becomes self-righteous; and, in like manner, fond of extremes of unbelief, we are apt, from very inability to direct our own steps, to rush into the extremes of presumption. The Lord, who alone is able to keep us from falling, of his great mercy send light and grace from on high, to lead, and guide, and sustain us, in the right way.

“Then the devil taketh Jesus up into the holy city, &c.” He had been foiled, his head had been bruised in the wilderness, so now he chooses another scene of trial, and transfers our Lord to a pinnacle of the temple. Consider the place. It was the holy city, the city that God had chosen above all the cities of the earth, that he might set his name there. Nay, more, it was one of the holiest places in that holy city, the temple itself, the very “rest and dwelling-place of Jehovah,” in which he had often appeared in visible glory. Yet Satan chose it as the scene of his vile temptations. There is no place on earth so holy that a foul tempter may not enter. The true believer’s closet is a place consecrated by many prayers and tears, and much sweet communion. Yet Satan is not afraid to venture there. The Church is the house of God, it is Bethel, and to many an one the gate of heaven, yet Satan is not afraid to venture there. In the closet, in the Church, at the communion table, he is always busy, yea perhaps, *most* busy there.

“He setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple.” We must beware in this place of going beyond what is written. But sure it is, as in the material, so also in the spiritual world, high places are slippery places, where the head is in danger of becoming giddy, and of betraying us into a fall. Some, for instance, we read of, who, “being lifted up with pride, fall into the condemnation of the devil.” And the Apostle Paul tells us, that, “lest he should be exalted by the abundance of the revelations, God sent a thorn in the flesh,” to keep him low. Very different from the purpose of Satan is the purpose of God in his dealings with his people, God casts them down to the depths, that from the depths they may cry, and that he may exalt them in due season. Whereas Satan’s aim is to lift them up that so he may cast them down. Oh let us watch and pray against pride and vain glory, spiritual pride and sinful boastings of what God has wrought either in us, or for us, or by us.

When the sails are spread out to the very top of the mast, the squall when it comes is all the more dangerous and destructive. It is ours, then, to carry a low sail; to watch against pride. If there is a salvation wrought, it is a salvation wrought by the Lord's right hand; let us be content to be accounted fools and babes for Christ's sake.

But let us now proceed to consider the temptation. It is in these words, "If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down." What! has the foul tempter still his doubts—is he not yet satisfied that Christ is the Son of God? Yes, he knew from the first with whom he had to contend—he knew that his was a contest with Omnipotence in human form—he even knew, perhaps, that he must certainly be foiled; but this was one of his latest and most desperate endeavours to maintain possession of the empire which is about to be wrested from his grasp. Like the struggles of a fierce lion when the net of the hunters is thrown over him—like the lashing of the waves against the rock, which fall back in scattered drops from its sides; so was it with Satan's reiterated attacks on our Lord. He knew full well that this was the Son of God, and that he was as a child in the hand of a giant; yet his proud spirit contended to the last. In the former temptation, he would have *Jesus* doubt if he was the Son of God; he would have him distrust God's fatherly care, and put forth his power to provide bread for himself. But in this temptation, he would remind him of the doubts which the Jews entertained of his Sonship. True, they had seen by the banks of Jordan, heaven opened, and the Spirit in a visible form descending and lighting on him; and they had heard a voice from the excellent Majesty, declaring him to be the "beloved Son of God." They had heard and they had seen all this, but they are still unconvinced. Now, then, Satan argues, is your opportunity for scattering all their doubts, and for giving them startling evidence of thy Sonship, "cast thyself down," down from this pinnacle into the courts of the temple beneath, now thronged with a crowd of worshippers, and these courts will resound with hosannas, they will bid thee welcome, as indeed the Son of God and the Saviour of the world.

Such was the temptation, and it discovers at once the depths of Satan's subtilty and his fiendish cruelty too. There is wondrous subtilty in it. For the tempter knew our Lord's errand into the world; even that he might persuade sinners to believe in him, and that believing they might have life through his name. And here he sets before him a plan by which he might at once dissipate all their doubts and confirm their faith in him; by a wondrous miracle, casting himself down from a giddy height and yet alighting safe and unhurt amidst the multitudes in the courts beneath. But there was also a fiendish cruelty in it. In the

first temptation his appeal had been to a carnal appetite, "Jesus was an hungered." But in this it was to the very inmost and most powerful and pervading emotion of the heart of the Son of God, his love to the poor perishing sinners of Jerusalem. The tears which he afterwards shed when from the Mount of Olives "he beheld the city," and that most touching exclamation "Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thee as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings," sufficiently attest how his compassionate soul yearned over them. I say, then, there was a fiendish cruelty in appealing to so generous an emotion as this, in saying, as if pointing to the poor perishing multitudes that stood below, "cast thyself down and then these poor sinners will believe in thee and be saved."

But further. Satan has still another dart in his quiver, and one borrowed from the word of God itself, for he adds "it is written, he shall give his angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands they shall bear thee up lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone." What! is Saul also amongst the Prophets? Does the Devil know the Bible? So it seems. Aye, and he knows one of the richest parts of it, a psalm, the 91st psalm, which is stored with precious promises from the beginning to the end of it. Truly Christ's people are a tempted people. They retire to their closets—they open God's word—weary with this wilderness world they seek for comfort and refreshment in its "green pastures and by its still waters," yet even there Satan may meet and distract and terrify them. He would fain turn the bread of life into a stone, he would hold his crooked and distorting glass between their eye and the word, that he may "deceive if it were possible the very elect." What believer is not familiar with his devices in this way. That command, for instance, "provide things honest in the sight of all men," he would convert it into an encouragement to worldliness. And that other "take a little wine" into an encouragement to drunkenness. And that other text, "the Sabbath was made for man," how often is it converted into a shield for the Sabbath-breaker? And so here "cast thyself down for he shall give his angels charge over thee."

But observe, while doubtless he believes, he misquotes the promise. For in the 91st psalm it runs thus, "He shall give his angels charge over thee *to keep thee in all thy ways.*" He takes care to leave out the last clause in the verse, "*to keep thee in all thy ways,*" that is, to uphold thee in the path of duty, in every path of duty, however rough and dangerous it may be. Why if he had quoted this, the text, so far from tending to cast down the Redeemer, would rather have ministered to his support. Satan must needs quote a garbled promise—he must needs construct a weapon from the Word to suit his own purposes, else the



Redeemer might have wrested it from his hand and turned it against himself. Thou sayest, he might have told him, that the "angels have charge to keep me *in all my ways*;" but this is not one of them, this is not one of the paths which God has marked out for me; I have no commission to cast myself down from this pinnacle; this way is one of thine, one of thine own advising, which if I follow I shall sin against God. My friends, does Satan ever tempt you through the Word, to sin; then go to that Word, that particular passage through which he tempts you, weigh it well, read the context, compare it with others, and withal pray for light, and then fear not, with the sword of the Spirit you will speedily make Satan flee from you.

And this leads us to consider our Lord's answer to this temptation. It is short, but how sweetly and powerfully does it meet the temptation. Eight words and Satan is overthrown. "Jesus answered, it is written again, thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." These words we find in the sixth chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy at the 16th verse; in which chapter, after a variety of injunctions which Moses addressed to the Israelites in regard to their duty, now that they are about to enter the promised land, he adds, "ye shall not tempt the Lord your God as ye tempted him in Massah." And the tempting of God in Massah is related in Exod. xvii 1-7. We there find that journeying through the wilderness they came to Rephidim, and there were ready to perish for lack of water; but that, instead of waiting patiently—as well they might who had seen such wondrous miracles wrought on their behalf in the land of Egypt and at the Red Sea—they began to murmur. They came tumultuously to Moses and said, "give us water;" they demanded an immediate miracle to be wrought on their behalf; they were not content to wait till God in his providential care over them should send springs in the desert. No, they would cast off God and demand a miracle to be wrought for them by his servant. "Give us water," they said, it seems a question "if the Lord is among us or no," use then that rod, that wonder-working rod by which ere now thou hast controlled the elements, and bring us water out of this burning sand or yonder barren rock. And what was their sin? Was it not a casting off of God and a trusting in his servant, that minister of mercy through whom he had led them forth. It was presumption; it was a tempting of God to leave them to themselves as Moses said, "why chide ye me?" "why will ye tempt the Lord?"

Now observe, that our Lord's answer to the tempter is all the more appropriate that there is a certain not very remote analogy between his circumstances and those of the children of Israel. Both were engaged in an arduous undertaking, and both were for a time *apparently* forsaken

of God. The Israelites were thirsting for water, the Redeemer was "thirsting, yea panting, for the courts of God's house," for the arrival of the period when he should be manifested to Israel and publish to them the glad tidings of salvation. Israel cast themselves on Moses and craved at his hand a miracle through which they might quench their thirst. And Satan, in like manner, would have Jesus cast himself on the guardianship of angels, that, borne in their arms from the battlements of the temple to its lower court, he might thus "coming suddenly to his temple," enter at once on his public ministry. The temptation was a most specious and subtle one, but eight words scattered it to the winds and struck dumb the tempter, "thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." Learn from this the power and majesty of God's word. Satan falls like lightning before it. It needed not a lengthened argument to cast him down—a single text, a text well-chosen and brought home, and the tempter is vanquished.

And now, let us draw one or two *practical lessons* from this subject. Let me ask you, does not Satan often tempt you to tempt God? *First*, let me ask the sinner, does he never tempt you to make trial of the *patience and forbearance of God*? Does he never tempt you to "turn the grace of God into licentiousness." What is his commonest argument with the perishing: his subtle whisper, by which he keeps the child immersed in sin till he becomes a youth, and the youth till he becomes a man, a grey-headed man, but simply this, "you will have time to repent before you come to die." Now what is yielding to such an argument but a tempting of God? Is not every hour spent in sin, a trial of God's forbearance? God has given abundant proof to you, as he gave to Israel, that he is able to deliver you—that he is willing to deliver you. He has sent his Son, and in his death there is ample provision made for taking away guilt, in his blood for cleansing from sin, in his merits for justifying, in his spirit for quickening the poor, guilty, filthy, dead sinner. What more could you ask, what more do you need, than this?—the doors of the storehouses of God are thrown open to you. And yet you are content to linger on in sin and danger, every day bringing you nearer the grave, and the judgment seat, and hell, yet still you tarry in the city of destruction, and count on some future time, some convenient season, some almost miraculous interposition of grace on your behalf. What is this but a tempting of God? Satan sets a sin before you, and he says, "cast thyself down," give the lust its full swing, and enjoy it while you may, for it shall not surely land you in the depths of hell. No, there is a good time at hand, when the sin shall be forgiven, and ye shall land safely and quietly at length in the courts of the new Jerusalem. Tell me, is it not so with you every day?

—every day there is some new trial of God's forbearance, some fresh "presumptuous sin."

What can we do, you may, perhaps, be inclined to ask, for God has left us in this miserable state, and unless he put forth a helping hand, it is vain for us to strive. This is just what Israel said, they denied that "the Lord was among them." But very different would it have been with them, if, instead of crying to Moses, "give us water," they had gone to their knees and prayed God for it. Very different would it have been if they had owned and made trial of the Lord's power, and the Lord's faithfulness in this matter. Very different was it, on another occasion, on which, as we read, the "Princes of Israel dug with their staves; and as they dug, they sung, Spring up, O well." And forthwith, in the use of these means, and at the sound of that cheerful, prayerful song, the refreshing streams came gushing forth from amidst the burning sands, at which they drank and lived. Yes, and so will it be with you, if you use the means and pray; if you dig in the word for the living well of living water, and pray to God to make it spring. Oh! cease to make trial of God's patience, and now resolve that you will make trial of his power and faithfulness and love and truth, and ye shall find rest to your souls.

But *secondly*, let me address one word to the professing people of God, and remind them, that to *tamper with sin, in the hope that grace will be given to resist it*, is a tempting of God. Sometimes God's children may be tempted, trusting in their strength, even to court temptation, somewhat like the vagrant warriors of old, who wandered over the length and breadth of the land, seeking for some one who might measure spears with them. Like Lot, and like David, and like Peter, they sometimes place themselves in circumstances in which they know they shall be sorely tried. One goes to the ball-room; and another to the race-course; and a third even to the tavern; and another frequents the society of godless worldings; and another loves to sit under the shadow of the great; and another is engrossed in the fictions and fooleries of a novel or a play; and another allows the sinful wanderings of his imagination to forbidden objects—and yet, in these circumstances, they trust that grace will be given, that they shall come forth scathless from the midst of the fire. Now what is this but a casting of ourselves down, or tempting of the Lord our God? He would be accounted a madman who would cast himself into a deep pool or into a raging furnace, in the hope that some one may be at hand to pluck him out; and what better are these? They trust to grace, in circumstances in which grace may be denied. They court the danger, and then, when the danger comes, they cry for aid. What can they look

for, but that aid should be withheld, and that they should be met with the withering rebuke, "thou shouldst not tempt the Lord thy God?"

Yes, it is only when we meet temptation in the path of duty, that we can look or cry for help from on high. Let it be in the narrow way of life that we meet the tempter, and neither his terror, nor his threats, nor fiery darts need make us tremble—need cause us to give back a single inch—for then we have this promise, amongst others, to back us, "He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways." "Who is he that shall harm us, if we be followers of that which is good?" "*Who is he?*" This is a triumphant defiance given to all the powers of earth and hell. For, if we stand in the strength of God in the post of duty, we need not fear though it be the post of danger. He who set us there, is surely able to maintain us there. I have seen the father set his infant child on the parapet of a lofty bridge, but there is no danger to that little child; for his father's arm is underneath and around him, and he holds him there with a firmer and more anxious grasp, than if he had set his feet on the grassy sward. And so with God and his elect children; dangers they must encounter, but the greater the danger the greater his tender care. "He pitieth them that fear him, for he knoweth their frame, he remembereth that they are dust."

Let me remind you, *in conclusion*, that you will encounter temptations without going in search of them. God has appointed them, and they are numbered amongst the "all things" that shall work together for his people's good. "Yea, I find it most true," says Rutherford, "that the greatest temptation out of hell, is to live without temptations; if my waters would stand, they would rot. Faith is the better for the free air, and the sharp winter storm in its face; grace withereth without adversity. The devil is but God's master-fencer, to teach us to handle our weapons." But let us see to it that we have weapons. The word is God's armoury. Are you tempted to unbelief? What an impenetrable shield is the assurance, that "God is faithful, who hath promised." Are you tempted to worldliness? Then cast back the temptation with that word, "That a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth." To uncleanness? Then remember Joseph's refuge, "how shall I do this great wickedness and sin against God." Be thou faithful unto death, and then all the powers of hell cannot come between thee and the crown of life. Amen.

## LECTURE XVI.

THE TRANSLATION OF ELIJAH.

BY THE REV. THOMAS DOIG, A.M., TORRYBURN.

“ And it came to pass when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. And he said, Thou hast asked an hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not it shall not be so. And it came to pass, as they still went on and talked, that, behold! there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.”—2 Kings ii. 9—12.

Of the many worthies whose lives are recorded in Scripture for our improvement, there is none more illustrious than the prophet Elijah. He had now finished the work assigned to him on earth, and was aware that the time of his departure was at hand. In these circumstances, he had resolved, in the company of Elisha, his anointed successor, to visit “the schools of the prophets,”—those seminaries of theological learning which were the hope of the persecuted church of Israel. Having accomplished this, he felt that he had done with the world and all its concerns, and expressed a wish that his friend might leave him. Elisha, however, was desirous of remaining with him to the end; and to his earnest request, that he might thus be favoured, Elijah at last consented. They had thus crossed together the waters of Jordan, which yielded miraculously to the stroke of Elijah’s mantle, and approached the spot which was to be the scene of their last interview on earth.

It is here that we are introduced to the narrative we are now to consider, where mention is made, in the first place, of the prophet’s parting legacy. “It came to pass when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee.” Thus was his magnanimity made manifest, and a lesson, at the same time, taught us, that the nearer we approach the confines of eternity, the more concerned we ought to be about the welfare of those we are to leave behind us. Much had Elijah already done to prepare his successor for the duties of his office; and now he anticipates the desires of his friend, and, with true greatness

of soul, makes to him an unlimited offer of a parting testimony of regard. How impressively does this remind us of the manner in which God makes known to us his grace! The Lord has ever gone before us in providing for our well-being; our petitions for an interest in his favour have been anticipated. If at times we have wanted that which would have done us good, it has been because we have disregarded the gracious offer. The tokens of God's loving-kindness have been pressed on our notice, but we have disregarded them; and therefore it is that we have failed to realise blessings which otherwise would have been ours.

If in the offer of Elijah there is a magnanimity which it becomes us to admire, so also in the reply of Elisha. "I pray thee," said he, "let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." With respect to the precise meaning of this request, it has been disputed whether the blessing solicited was a portion the double of that with which Elijah had been favoured, or simply that measure of the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit which in Scripture is termed the double portion, or portion of the first-born,—a measure of the Spirit's gifts which Elijah himself had enjoyed. But, on either supposition, evidence is furnished both of his elevated conceptions of the munificence of God, and of the consciousness which he felt of his own weakness and insufficiency. Aware that the largest supplies of the Spirit's influences were necessary to qualify him for his work, the conviction of this appears to have affected him more powerfully than ever. The prospect of the removal of Israel's illustrious prophet made him feel his own emptiness; and this, seemingly, it was that led him to solicit a portion the double of that which the prophets in ordinary enjoyed; or even, if such was the import of his request, the double of that with which his distinguished master had been honoured. "Be ye filled with the Spirit," is one of the apostle's exhortations. His miraculous gifts, it is true, are not now to be expected; the ends for which these had been imparted having long since been answered. We are still, however, to look for his ordinary gifts, inasmuch as the Spirit is the seal of the believer's union with Christ. It is because his gifts are not sufficiently prized by us that our attainments in the divine life are so weak. Let us, then, beware of undervaluing his operations; and if difficulties seem to stand in the way of our enjoying a large measure of his gifts, let us in consequence be only the more eager in our desires after them.

To impress Elisha with a due sense of the worth of that which he had solicited, and to induce him to seek it with redoubled earnestness, Elijah took particular notice of the difficulty of obtaining it. "Thou hast asked an hard thing," was his reply; not that it was an hard thing

for God to bestow, but that, according to the usual experience of men, it was hard or difficult, inasmuch as instances of such gifts being bestowed were of rare occurrence. That Elisha, therefore, might appreciate more thoroughly the worth of the desired gift, and that his diligence in the path of duty might be called forth to the uttermost, Elijah informed him of the peculiar circumstances in which alone the difficulty could be surmounted. "If thou see me," said he, "when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so." Are we, then, desirous of a larger measure of the Spirit's graces than we have hitherto enjoyed? Let us studiously have respect unto the path of commanded duty. An attentive observation of the manner of the Lord's dealings with Elijah was the particular sphere of duty prescribed to Elisha, if he would enjoy the desired blessing; and remissness in regard to this would be the means of allowing an opportunity to escape which could never be recalled. So also, if we would "covet the best gifts," we must wait upon every intimation of the will of God, marking especially the more striking displays of his providence and the more solemn manifestations of his grace. On this principle Elisha acted, clinging to his friend more closely than ever, and continuing to the last to profit by his holy society and heavenly discourse.

"And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that behold, there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder, and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." To inquire minutely about the chariot in which he was borne away might be deemed presumptuous. But there is nothing presumptuous in considering the fact which has been recorded for our admonition, and in enquiring for what purpose Elijah's translation was effected in this visible and singular manner. The "chariot and horses" were evidently designed to impart to Elijah's translation the character of a triumph, and to remove far from it those ideas of sadness with which the occurrence and even the very name of death are unavoidably associated. At the same time, God evidently intended to afford Elisha a display of his own glory, in exerting a power by which death was robbed of one victim, and a faithful servant rewarded by being exempted from the pain and dishonours of dissolution. God has a right to display his glory, and to exert his power in the manner that seems best to himself. And when it was His will that "a chariot of fire and horses of fire" should convey Elijah into heaven, we know that the resources for effecting this purpose could not be wanting. In whatever ignorance we may be left regarding their appearance, we seem warranted to infer that the ministry of angels was employed on this occasion. We know that on another occasion these heavenly messengers appeared to Elisha as a vast com-

pany of chariots and horsemen to guard him from his enemies. Elsewhere we read of angels under the very figure of chariots. "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels." And when we are informed that they are expressly sent forth or commissioned as ministering spirits to minister to them that shall be "heirs of salvation," and, besides, not only know that they shall be employed at the last day to gather together "the elect of God" from the four winds of heaven, but also that they were the attendants of our Saviour in his ascension, it seems impossible to avoid the conclusion that the honour which awaits the saints in their glorification, was not denied to him who was counted worthy of reaching glory without "tasting of death," and that the ministration which was employed at the ascension of "our fore-runner" into that within the veil, was not withheld from one of the most illustrious of his servants.

It is impossible to contemplate without the deepest interest the manner in which this illustrious saint was removed from the earth. Like Enoch in the antediluvian world, he knew not what it was to die. And why was he thus favoured? Was he without sin, so as to merit exemption from death? No; for we are assured that he was "a man subject to like passions as we are." As, then, in the salvation of the meanest believer, so in the peculiar distinction conferred upon Elijah, an illustration is afforded of the sentiment, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but of his mercy, he hath saved us." There must, however, have been special ends to be answered by this manifestation in his favour; and of these we may notice, the views which it unfolds of the character of God, as the God alike of providence and of grace.

"The Lord shall not see, neither shall God regard it," is the language of the world respecting the Divine administration; and, along with the impression that their own sins are unheeded, the wicked imagine that so it is with the faith, the patience, and the zeal of the saints. The marked features of Elijah's character, viewed in connection with his adverse fortune in the world, were eminently fitted to call forth in regard to him this common, though mistaken sentiment. He had been "very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts." When all apparently had "turned aside after idols," he had been a witness for the truth, and had told the king of Israel to his face that he and his wicked family were the troublers of the land. He had challenged the entire nation of Israel to meet him, and had constrained the people in a national assembly to acknowledge that Jehovah alone was God. Yet, after all, he was doomed apparently to wander as a persecuted outcast, while idolatry continued, seemingly, to be associated with a life of ease and



honour. In these circumstances, notwithstanding the weighty words to which, as Jehovah's prophet, he had given utterance, and the wonders which he had wrought in Jehovah's name, the Lord's providential government of the world would be regarded as a dream. But to these, the surmisings of unbelief, the translation of the prophet furnished a reply. A proof was thus afforded that "the eyes of the Lord are" indeed "upon the righteous," and that "his ear is open to their cry." This unlooked-for termination of his course established then, as it still establishes, the solemn fact, that "God is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him." We may have difficulties to encounter in testifying for the truth; we may be exposed to reproach and persecution in "contending for the faith once delivered to the saints;" yet evidence will never be wanting that "the Lord knoweth them that are his." If now we "suffer with Christ, we shall" hereafter "reign with him."

But, in the translation of Elijah, the character of God is seen as the God of providence; he is no less distinctly manifested as the God of grace. Amidst abounding iniquity, the promise of a Saviour from sin and misery had come to be overlooked; and, in these circumstances, the manner in which this distinguished witness for the truth was removed from the earth was a solemn attestation of the fact that a method of deliverance had actually been devised, and that victory over death, and the enjoyment of endless glory, formed the consummation of this deliverance. It would have the effect of keeping alive the hopes, and of strengthening the faith, of the ancient church, till a brighter day was ushered in by the resurrection and ascension of the Redeemer. So also ought we to be animated by the contemplation of it, especially when viewed in connection with the exaltation of Christ, in virtue, prospectively, of whose quickening influence it was accomplished. Thus regarded as a picture of the result of God's purposes of grace and mercy, we hail it as a pledge of "the glory to be revealed hereafter." It affords an illustration of the blessedness which awaits both the soul and the body of the believer in a future state of being. A specimen of the robe of immortality with which we shall one day be clothed is thus presented to our view. We are made aware of the fact that our mortal frame will be so transformed as to be fitted for an ever-during existence. And as the glorified body with which Elijah went up to heaven furnishes a demonstration of what the bodies of the saints will be when raised up at the last day, so, in the manner in which it was transformed when the fiery chariot caught him up from the earth, a display is afforded of the mode of that transmutation which the bodies of those saints will undergo who are alive at the coming of the Lord; for, says the apostle, "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of

an eye, at the sound of the last trumpet." These, if we belong to the family of God, are the high prospects awaiting us; and if death must be submitted to, it has been converted into a passage to immortal blessedness. With good reason, then, may not we exclaim with the apostle, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

In addition, however, to the fact that a glorified existence awaits the believer hereafter, does not the translation of Israel's prophet afford ground for the inference, that the quality or amount of glory laid up for God's people respectively, will be apportioned in some measure with a view to their present attainments in faith and holiness? With special reference to the distinguished path which Elijah trode as a confessor of the truth, we behold a peculiar honour conferred on him in the mode of his departure. And does not this seemingly intimate that a position of no common dignity has been assigned to him in the mansions of the blessed,—an idea which gathers strength when viewed in connection with his visit, many ages after, to our Lord on the mount of transfiguration? It is true, that the state of all in heaven will be glorious; for the meanest believer there will enjoy "an exceeding and eternal weight of glory." The blessedness of all, according to their several capacities, will be complete. But, whilst all are bright, some will shine with a brighter lustre than others. Unto every one will be given according to his improvement of the talents committed to him. All, doubtless, is the result of grace. For, as sinners, what have we, or what can we have, which we have not freely received? Yet, in accordance with the doctrine of grace, we have reason to infer that attainments in holiness here are associated with degrees of glory hereafter. "He that soweth sparingly shall reap sparingly, and he that soweth bountifully shall reap bountifully." How great the encouragement thus set before us! Let us be animated by the thought of "the recompence of the reward." Let us "covet earnestly the best gifts," and be ever "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." "And although it doth not yet appear what we shall be, we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."

Such are some of the important truths which the translation of the great prophet of Israel is fitted to teach us. It remains that we advert to the impression which the contemplation of it made upon Elisha. For, we are told, "he saw it." He beheld distinctly the celestial manifestation; he marked the instantaneous change that passed upon his friend, and gazed on the spectacle till it vanished in the skies. And, truly, it was a sight, whose glory, as well as solemnity, was fitted powerfully to

impress the mind. That Elisha was deeply moved as he looked on it, is evident from the intimation, that when he saw it, "he cried, my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!"—words which may be viewed as indicating a mixture of amazement and fear, of sorrow and despondency, of joy and exultation.

Whilst his impassioned exclamation, "my father, my father!" reminds us of the feeling which he had of his endeared connection with the prophet, do not the circumstances in which the words were spoken seem to intimate that he must have started while he uttered them? By means of previous expectancy, it is true, he was in a manner prepared for the event which had taken place. Yet, in the appearance of a chariot radiant with celestial fire, there was that which it was impossible for flesh and blood to look upon without alarm. Elisha was, indeed, expecting an unwonted display of the divine glory. The very suddenness, however, as well as majesty, of the disclosure would prevent him from viewing it calmly. Even in that stillness which succeeds the last sigh in an ordinary departure by death, the mere cessation of breathing conveys a feeling of surprise. How much more then, now that, in the midst of animated conversation, the conference was instantaneously broken off, and the connection instantaneously snapt asunder; and where the parting was solemnized by the demonstration of heaven's fire and the array of heaven's messengers, and where the whirlwind of the God of heaven finished the wonders of the scene!

But, along with a sentiment of amazement and fear, we remark, in the cry of Elisha, an expression of sorrow and despondency. Of this we have evidence in the subjoined statement, that when "he saw the prophet no more, he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces." Rending of the garments, while it was a token of mourning among the ancient nations of the east, was resorted to only on occasions of the intensest grief. Thus regarded, the cry, "my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!" must be viewed as the language of impassioned lamentation. Elisha was now separated from the friend he had ardently loved, from the counsellor in whom he had confided, from the instructor whom he had revered. All that bound him to the earth, save the service of his God, was gone; and he felt that he was left a stranger in the world. Why, then, should not sorrow take possession of his heart? In having been present as a witness of the prophet's translation, he had indeed become heir to one of the most precious of legacies; "a double portion" of his master's spirit was now his own. The violence of grief, however, behoved to be satisfied, and the voice of nature to be heard. It was, therefore, what might reasonably have been expected that he should bewail the loss he had sustained.

There is a tenderness in the expression of his sorrow, that beautifully illustrates the relation in which he stood towards the departed prophet. Regarding him with filial respect and affection, these his feelings must have been the stronger from the circumstance of Elijah having been his spiritual father, who had thrown around him the mantle of office, and had ever since, with paternal kindness, watched over him. The sacredness of such a bond is, indeed, unknown to the men of the world. But he who has experienced the power of divine grace, and who can look back on the period in his history when God, by the ministry of some honoured servant, made him first aware of his need of salvation, will have no difficulty in appreciating the feelings of Elisha, when the cry, "my father, my father!" was wrung from his agonized soul.

It is not, however, in the light of a private loss merely, that he mourns over the prophet's removal; he bewails it also as a public calamity. "The chariot of Israel," he exclaims, "and the horsemen thereof!" Seizing on the idea which the heavenly chariot of Elijah suggested, he laments the departure as that of one who had been the glory of the prophet, and defence of his native land—in whose eminent holiness, fervent prayers, and impressive instructions, was embodied the strength of a resistless army—and who had done more for the best interests of the commonwealth than all the forces of the kingdom had effected. In his removal that, to all appearance was gone which had constituted the happiness and safety of Israel; and, in these circumstances, Elisha felt that far better would it have been to have lost all the chariots and horsemen which were understood to constitute the strength of the nation, than the heavenly influence of the departed prophet. Thus considered, who can wonder that he should mourn over his master's removal? Individually, he had experienced a loss which no earthly friendship could compensate; while, as a patriot, he saw his country deprived of a blessing more precious than all the treasures it contained.

If, however, in his cry, we perceive an expression of impassioned sorrow, do not we also recognise in it the language of joy and exultation? This may possibly be thought to imply a contradiction. Yet who can tell how many conflicting emotions may agitate the mind almost at one and the same instant of time. Nor can it be denied, that if the remembrance of what Elijah had been was associated with the thought of what he had now become, the spectacle of his translation could scarcely fail to carry along with it a reviving sentiment. Even amidst the heaviest anguish it is animating to think of the departed great. When we call to mind the glory on which they have entered, the bitterness of grief is blended with an emotion of triumph. Who, that has stood by

the dying bed of an eminent saint, till the last sigh was over, has not in a manner risen from earth with the disembodied spirit ; rejoicing in the thought that the soul, so lately a sufferer, is now a glorified inhabitant of heaven ! If such an impression is felt in the departure of an ordinary believer, in the circumstances of whose death there may be nothing remarkable, how much more vividly must it have been felt by Elisha when he witnessed the triumphant translation of his master ? He had seen him drop the garment of mortality without a groan, and exchange it for an imperishable covering. He had seen him rise from the earth, invested with the robe, and seated in the chariot, of paradise. It could not be that such a spectacle imparted no emotion of triumph to his soul. If he exclaimed, as he saw the ascending prophet disappear, " My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof !" with this his cry there must have been blended a sentiment of joyful exultation ; for, now, the race of his honoured friend was over, and his warfare accomplished ; his trials were ended, and his victory complete.

And now, brethren, amongst other lessons which the narrative we have been considering is fitted to suggest, does it not remind us of the light in which those are to be regarded who have been distinguished for their zeal in the service of the Lord ? They are the glory and strength of a nation, its noblest bulwarks, " the chariots and the horsemen " thereof. If it be admitted that the stability and greatness of a commonwealth depend on the means of moral culture and religious improvement being brought to bear upon its population, and on the favour of God consequent upon the tone of pure and holy sentiment thus created, who can deny that those who labour to promote the cause of moral worth and Christian principle occupy a position, and exert an influence, in virtue of which they become a kingdom's defence and safety ? Unless it be denied that there is a God in heaven who has respect to such as fear his name, it is impossible to say what blessings he may not be ready to bestow upon a land for the sake of those who believe his word and reverence his laws. If, at Abraham's solicitation, the cities of the Plain would have escaped the wrath that came upon them, had even ten holy men been found within their precincts, who can tell what judgments may have been averted from us as a nation, because of the godly remnant amongst us ? And if a faithful ministration of the Divine word and ordinances has been the means, under God, of preserving such a remnant, who may estimate the amount of that influence which the Lord's devoted servants have contributed to our national stability ?

Whilst this holds true of all who belong to the godly portion of a community, it is eminently so of those whose zeal in the cause of Divine

truth has singled them out from amongst the generality of their countrymen. It was thus with Elijah in his day. Whatever may have been the influence associated with the faith and holiness of the "seven thousand in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal, nor kissed him," his zeal for the honour of Jehovah was such, that of him, in contradistinction to all around him, it might be said that he constituted Israel's defence and safety. His maintenance of the great truths which God had revealed to man—the uncompromising firmness with which he resisted every half measure of reforming purpose or profession—the fearlessness with which he denounced the Divine judgments in the presence of the very monarch that sought his life—the power which he had with the Almighty in prayer—all marked him out as one of the most distinguished of mankind, and justified the eulogium pronounced on him when he quitted the world. So it has been with others, raised up from time to time, whose attainments remind us in some measure of the character of this illustrious prophet. Thus our eyes are fixed on Luther and on Knox, as each, in his own sphere, the Elijah of the Reformation from Popery. There was a greatness about these men, which warrants our application to them of the sentiment, "The chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!" Our heroes and our statesmen, whom multitudes have idolized as the saviours of their country, how poor they are, in comparison of those who have known what it was to have power with God in prayer, and to prevail! Give me a band of Elijahs, who are prepared to denounce, in the ears of royalty itself, the persons that, by "plotting against the Lord and his anointed," have been the troublers of the land; and I will make you a present of the tribe of politicians of all parties, who, by their contempt of the claims of God and of Christ, have so often proved a nation's curse. Were the godly in our land to go on increasing in number day by day—were our judges, magistrates, and senators, generally men of faith and prayer, jealous above all things for that which concerned the honour of Jehovah, it would be a bright prospect that was before us. But, alas! how few are to be found, especially in high places, who either know or care about the "one thing needful!" And, in these circumstances, how loud the call that is addressed to us to be up and doing in witness-bearing for the truth! Unto each of us a talent has been given to occupy and improve; and a heavy reckoning awaits us, if we fail to employ it in the service of the Lord. Examine yourselves, then, in regard to the sentiments you have cherished, and the line of conduct you have pursued in times past; and let it be your resolution, through the grace given you, to consecrate for the future your time, your talents, and your influence to the cause of your God and Saviour. Believing brethren, ye are witnesses for God; and you are guilty

of sin, if you fail to make it manifest that this is your character. You are not at liberty to "hide your talent in the earth." God has put his candle into your hand; and you are not at liberty to "put it under a bushel." "Let your light so shine before men," is the command of Christ, "that they may see your good works, and glorify our Father who is in heaven." Let it be seen in all your actings, that you are not ashamed of him whose servants you profess to be. Thus, while you are yourselves partakers of the most precious of blessings, who can tell what blessings you may be the means of imparting to multitudes around you?

## LECTURE XVII.

BY THE REV. HORATIUS BONAR, KELSO.

“Whose voice then shook the earth : but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this *word*, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore, we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear : For our God is a consuming fire.”—HEBREWS xii. 26-29.

It is of the *voice* of Jehovah that the Apostle here speaks. That voice, as being the expression of his mind, the utterance of his purpose, went forth armed with the power of Godhead. For it was not the mere majesty or melody of the sound which issued from the lips of Jehovah that wrought the vast results, but the resistless purpose which it expressed.

Of this *voice* we read, “the voice of Jehovah is powerful, the voice of Jehovah is full of majesty : the voice of Jehovah shaketh the wilderness, Jehovah shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh.” (Psalm xxix. 4.) It was this voice that said, “let there be light and there was light.” It was this voice which spake so often to the Patriarchs and Prophets. It was this voice that was heard on Sinai shaking the mountain and the whole desert around.\* It is this voice which is yet to be heard again on earth saying, “behold I make all things new.”

There are two shakings here referred to by the Apostle ; the first is that of Sinai, which is already past, the second is that at the Lord’s coming, which is still future. Of this still future shaking he affirms three things.

I. *It is a final shaking.* It is but “once more,” and then all creation is at rest for ever. It is but “once more” that the awful voice is to be heard. It is but “once more” that the stormy vengeance of Jehovah is to be let loose upon the earth to work havoc there. That last tempest is even now drawing together its clouds of darkness from every region, and mustering its strength for the terrible outburst—an outburst terrible indeed, but yet the LAST !

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\* This was the *ψηλαφωμενω ορει* of verse 18, “the mountain that was touched,” *i. e.*, touched by God, as we read, “touch the mountains and they shall smoke.”



II. *It is a more extensive shaking than any heretofore.* "I shake not the earth only but also heaven." The heaven here spoken of is not the "third heaven," which is the peculiar dwelling place of God and the shrine of his glory; but the visible heavens above us—the same as those of which we read, "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." This universal shaking is that which Jesus himself predicted in these words, "immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken." (Matt. xxiv. 29.) It is also that of which the prophet Isaiah, in his 24th chapter, has given at length so dark a picture: "the earth is utterly broken down, the earth is clean dissolved, the earth is moved exceedingly; the earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage." Very fearful will these convulsions be. Above, beneath, around; earth, air, and sea shall be all one dark, wide circle of infinite desolation and terror. And there shall be no hiding place from that wind, no covert from that wasteful tempest, no refuge from that universal uproar! Careless sinner! What shall then become of thee?

III. *It is a shaking followed by a glorious issue.* It is not for the annihilation of this material fabric, nor is it for reducing all things to their primitive chaos. It is for a very different end. That end is *twofold*. There is first "the removing of those things which are shaken as of things which are made," that is, things of perishable workmanship. Then there is the consolidating of what resists and survives this shaking into an immoveable creation. The whole universe is to undergo this shaking in order that all that is perishable and crumbling may be shaken off, and the imperishable, the stable, the eternal may remain. How glorious! Here surely is enough to outweigh in the estimate of the saint, all that is gloomy and terrible in the scenes that lie between. The foreground is dark, but the scene beyond it is all glad and bright. The commotions in immediate prospect of which we are already beginning to descry the forerunners, are apt to depress and sadden; but all beyond that is so stable, so unchanging, and spreads itself out before us in such refulgent, holy beauty, that we can overleap the dreary interval and stay our hearts as well as refresh our eyes with the glory to be revealed when the skirts of the last cloud shall be seen passing off in the distance, and the echo of the last thunder heard remotely upon the joyful hills.

The Apostle having thus foretold the convulsions of the last days, and alluded to the "times of the restitution of all things," proceeds to shew the effect which these things should have upon believers, and in what a solemn attitude it places them. This is the object of what follows, which, from the use of the word "wherefore," is obviously an in-

ference from his preceding statements. Keeping this in view, let us endeavour to understand each clause in succession. In doing so we shall follow the order not of the words but of the ideas.

I. *The Kingdom.* It is "a kingdom which cannot be moved." All present things are to be shaken, and out of these is to come to the kingdom that cannot be moved—a kingdom unchangeable and eternal. Sin, we know, has loosened every thing, transforming a stable world into a decaying, crumbling ruin. In order that stability may be restored, all things must be shaken, and after these shakings comes this immoveable kingdom. There may be reference here to Daniel's prophecy of the kingdoms which were to arise on the earth. There was first the Babylonian, lion-hearted, eagle-winged (Dan. vii. 4), mighty and magnificent as if it could not but abide for ever. Yet, when it had served God's purposes, and run its ordained course, it passed away like a vision of the night, proving that it was not the kingdom that cannot be moved. Then, out of its wide ruins there arose the second kingdom, that of the Medes and Persians, ravenous and devouring as if it would swallow up all others, and remain in its strength. But it, too, fell to pieces and departed, proving that it was not "the kingdom which cannot be moved." Then, out of the ruins of the second there shot up the third kingdom, the Macedonian, renowned for its winged swiftness of conquest and far-ranging dominion. But it, too, fell asunder and crumbled away, showing that it was not "the kingdom which cannot be moved." Then there arose the fourth, the Roman kingdom, "dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly." It still survives, even as it has survived the storms of many a century, the shock of a thousand earthquakes. But its days are numbered too. And when it has fulfilled Jehovah's purposes and finished its appointed course, then shall it pass away like the chaff of the summer thrashing-floor, proving that neither is it "the kingdom which cannot be moved." But out of the wrecks of these broken empires, there arises yet another kingdom very different from all the rest,—different in origin, in nature, and in duration. It is thus described: "I saw in the night visions, and behold! one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given to him dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him: *his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.*" (Dan. vii. 3.)

Here, then, is the kingdom which "cannot be moved," glorious and imperishable, which is to outlast all others here, nay, to be established

upon their ruins, and to stand for ever. There is no kingdom like this among all that has ever been. Everything about it is incorruptible, as well as undefiled. Its territory, its subjects, its laws, its throne, its sceptre, its Sovereign, are all everlasting! Nothing can shake it. No war, no enemy, can disturb its peace. No storm, no earthquake, can assail it. No internal weakness or decay can dismember or dissolve it. It shall be in itself unchangeable and immoveable; and, besides, all that could weaken it from within, or wage war against it from without, shall have passed away for ever. The day of its duration shall be the eternal Sabbath—the rest that remaineth for the people of God.

II. *The Kings.* Who are they? “WE,” says the apostle,—that is, not “we apostles,” but “we saints.” As believers, we have received a kingdom, being made kings and priests unto God; being made “heirs of God, joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.” Hence we read, also, in that chapter we have already quoted, “The saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom, for ever, even for ever and ever” (Dan. vii. 18–27). In believing, then, we not only receive forgiveness and eternal life; but we receive a kingdom too. It becomes ours in *right*, though not exactly ours in *possession*, till the time appointed of the Father. What honour! what dignity! what glory is this! Angels are but “ministering spirits:” we are kings—partakers with Christ himself of his crown and throne! Behold what manner of love the father hath bestowed upon us! What a holy life should then be ours! Surely we may be expected to keep in mind our coming glory, and to walk worthy of it—worthy of such a calling, and of such a kingdom! What is the world to us, whether in its poverty or wealth, its glory or its shame, who have already received an everlasting kingdom, and shall ere long wear an unfading crown?

And, oh! let careless sinners think how much they lose. What an infinite gain might be theirs; and what an infinite loss shall infallibly be theirs, if they turn away from him who speaketh from heaven. Hear, then, and your souls shall live; nay, you shall receive a kingdom too!

III. *Our present position and employment.* It is that of “serving God.” “Let us serve God,” says the apostle. Our whole life is to be one of service: not merely certain portions of our life, but our entire life from the moment that we believe. It is the life of men redeemed to God, and who have therefore become his property. It is not merely in the closet or the sanctuary, upon the bended knee or with the clasped

hand, that this service is to be performed, but always and in every action of our life.

The allusion here seems to be to the Levitical service under the former law. In that we have the true specimens of what God calls service—priestly service. “Every priest, it is written, standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices.” It was a continual ministering before the Lord and in his temple. All that was done was done to God as under his immediate eye. That carnal priesthood has been done away. There is but one High Priest now, and he is above in the better sanctuary. There is no longer any of the indirect communication through the medium of a fellow-sinner. All our dealing is directly with God, for we are God’s priests on earth. Each saint is a priest unto God as well as a king. And as Jehovah’s priesthood, we serve in the true sanctuary which the Lord pitched and not man. Ours is a consecrated life, and therefore a continual service, the service of priests. We are sprinkled with blood set apart for God, and our whole life is to be one of *priestly service*. Not merely in our holy duties, or at our holy times, but always. Each word we speak is to be an act of priestly service; each step we take is to be an act of priestly service; each action of our life is to be an act of priestly service. And this unceasingly; at every time, in every place, in every station, in every act, we are to remember that we are God’s priesthood.

In believing, we become Jehovah’s priests. The blood is sprinkled upon us, the holy anointing oil is poured over us, the priestly raiment is put upon us. We take our censers and enter into the tabernacle of our God; no longer merely into the holy place, but into the holiest of all, through the veil that was rent. We make our dwelling within these hallowed walls. We pitch our tent beside the mercy-seat, under the immediate vision of the glory. Our whole life is to be spent in that sanctuary. For it is not a going out and coming in, but an abiding there. All we think, or feel, or say, or do, is to be done there as under the very eye of God.

How solemn is a believer’s life! What an exalted, yet what a blessed thing! To be a priest unto God, and, as his priest, to dwell in his temple, to serve him there unceasingly, and to go out no more! What a dignity does it throw over the life even of the meanest saint! What an importance does it attach to his most common actions and thoughts! For his whole life is priestly service—a service of a nearer and more peculiar kind than angels. They serve, but not as priests. All our service is priestly as well as royal.

How solemn should our walk and conversation be! How anxious to

redeem the time, to make it manifest that we consider ourselves wholly God's, set apart for him, and dedicated to his service alone. What room is there left for folly, or frivolity, or vanity, or worldliness? With our holy garments upon us, our censers in our hands, and standing under the shadow of the glory, how can we give way to levity, or wickedness, or indolence in circumstances so unutterably solemn and overawing. Oh! what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness!

IV. *In what manner is this service to be performed?* Acceptably and reverentially.

(1.) *Acceptably*—that is so as to please God. In all our service this is to be distinctly kept in mind. In our prayers, praises, duties, we are not only to gratify ourselves but to please God. All our service is to be fragrant to him, a sweet-smelling savour, “a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God.” Let us observe, however, that to serve God acceptably, is not to serve *for the purpose of making ourselves accepted*. No; before our services can be accepted, we must be accepted ourselves. It is not our services that make us acceptable, but we that make our services. We do not serve in order to be accepted, but we serve because, in believing, we have already been made accepted in the beloved. We do not pray and praise in order to make ourselves accepted, but because we have been previously accepted in Christ Jesus. A saint is not one who serves God in order to be forgiven, but one who, having found forgiveness, serves God in love and liberty as a forgiven soul, and with an enlarged heart.

(2.) *With reverence and godly fear*. There is to be no irreverence, no rashness, no presumption in our service, as if God were one like ourselves, or nearly upon our level. There is to be fear and solemn awe when we consider whom we worship; who we are who are thus permitted to draw near; in what temple it is that we worship, and what blood it cost ere we could be permitted to enter. Reverence in the presence of God is often spoken of and enjoined upon all who draw near to Him. See Psalms xxii. 23; xxxiii. 8; xxxi. 9; lxxxix. 7; cxv. 11-13. Oh what profound and self-abasing reverence of spirit does the service of Jehovah demand of us! How entirely does it rebuke all levity and vain speech or frivolous deportment even in our common walk of life! How can we serve God, and yet indulge in foolish talking and jesting? How can we serve God, and yet join with the world in its idle words, its laughter, its gaiety, its song, its mirth? Surely it becomes us to preserve reverence and godly fear in all things—in our actions, in our

words, in our very looks and tones. Let our deportment be ever such as becometh the servants of the most high God, his royal Priesthood here below, who, though serving him in weakness here and in the midst of much prevailing sin, are anticipating the time when we shall serve him in the fulness of our strength and in the perfection of holiness, without infirmity, without weariness, and without end.

V. *How are we to maintain this service?* By holding fast grace,\* says the Apostle. Let us, says he, *have or hold fast grace*, whereby we may serve God acceptably. It is only by continuing in that free love of God into the joy of which we entered when first we believed that we can be enabled to serve him aright. As sinners, we laid hold of that free love at first, and found forgiveness there; and it is as sinners that we are still to keep hold of that same free love in which alone we can find a resting place. When that free love entered our souls, it brought with it liberty and gladness and light. It dispelled all our darkness; it removed all our sorrow, it struck off every fetter, and blessed us with the liberty of God's beloved Son. And it is in this same love that we are to abide to the end. We are to beware of losing sight of it, or letting it go. Our believing this free love first brought us nigh; and it is our continuing to believe it just as at the first that keeps us nigh. It is the "beginning of our confidence" that we are to hold fast to the end. As we have received Christ Jesus, even so are we to walk in him and abide in him.

There is no other way in which we can render acceptable service. The moment I lose sight of this, my service becomes unacceptable, nay, displeasing to God. If I am allowing suspicions of God to enter my soul, or doubts to arise as to what his feelings are towards me, then I cannot serve him *acceptably*, I may serve him outwardly, but it will be in bondage, not as a son. And can I be an acceptable worshipper if I come in the spirit of bondage and not in the spirit of adoption? Can I be an acceptable worshipper if I draw near, denying, or at least doubting his grace, his free love? Can I be an acceptable worshipper if I know nothing of forgiveness and peace with the God I come to worship? Can that be worship or service which knows no liberty, no joy, no love, no enlargement of heart, but instead of these, can tell only of gloom, and suspicion, and uncertainty? God, in the riches of his free love, forgives me that I may serve him acceptably. This is his way. But I reverse the order. I serve him in order that I may procure forgiveness.

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\* This is the marginal reading, and is a common meaning of  $\epsilon\chi\omega$ . See 1 Tim. i. 19; iii. 9; 2 Tim. i. 13.

But in this there is nothing acceptable, because there is no keeping hold of the free love of God.

Yet is not the life of many Christians in our day just a life of bondage and of doubt? How little of acceptable service does God receive from all the tens of thousands that name his name! And whence is this? The grace of God is not their resting-place. The free love of God is not the main-spring of their lives. And till this is the case there can be no acceptable service, no glowing zeal, no simple-hearted, unwearied, joyful labour in the cause of God. An intolerable weight presses them down, and an unseen chain fetters every limb. How sad! that the glad tidings of the grace of God should have done no more for them than this? Yet these same glad tidings still compass them about; and will they not even now believe them and be set free from bondage? Will they not believe them, that being delivered from these burdens, they may gladly enter into Jehovah's service with all the joy and zeal which men who have tasted that love, and are living upon it, cannot help displaying?

But a question naturally arises here—How does a sight of this free love produce reverence and godly fear? It is not so difficult to show how it produces acceptable service, but how does it produce reverent service? In many ways; but chiefly in the following:—

(1.) Grace takes for granted the infinite evil of sin and our infinite wickedness. It proceeds entirely upon this from first to last. It refuses to deal with us on any terms save the acknowledgment that we are utterly corrupt and lost. It will not concede to us one particle of good, otherwise grace were no more grace. It is the most thoroughly condemning, man-humbling thing that can be conceived. It makes us totally debtors,—nothing short of this. It will only take our case in hand upon the admission of our entire and desperate wickedness. It brings free forgiveness, but only upon the acknowledgment that we are altogether guilty. It brings salvation, but only on the supposition that we are completely lost. And if such be the case, is not the free love of God the most humbling thing in the world? And is not the sight of it the most likely to produce reverence and godly fear?

(2.) Grace shows us far more of God than we could ever learn in any other way. God's way of saving sinners is also his way of bringing to view the depths and heights of his own glorious character. It gives us a new sight into it, and opens up to us most marvellous discoveries of his greatness, glory, majesty, wisdom, and might, as well as of his love. Nothing unveils to us so much of God as *grace*. And surely that which spreads out before us his infinitely glorious character and purposes

must be the thing, of all others, most fitted to abase us—to produce the profoundest reverence towards that all-excellent, all-perfect one. When we knew less of God there might be irreverence, but not now. In the case of Adam, or of angels who see less of the character of God than a redeemed sinner sees, their might be the *possibility* of irreverence, but surely not in us, who know something of the exceeding riches of the grace of God, and of his kindness towards us in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(3.) Grace brings us far nearer God. It takes us into the inner circle, nearer far to God than Adam was before he fell, nearer than angels are who never fell. And surely that which brings us so near to God must produce reverence and godly fear. They who dwell afar off, who occupy the outer circles of being, may be irreverent; but those who stand so near to God, who have not only come into his tabernacle, but been made to dwell even in the holiest, can never cherish or tolerate the faintest approach to irreverence or want of solemnity in the service of God. We are one with Christ, we are members of his body, we are joint heirs with him of all that he has received of the Father. And this union, this nearness, is above all other things fitted to awaken reverence in the soul. The more we realize this nearness by dwelling in the grace of God, the more shall we be broken down and filled with lowliness of spirit in worshipping this great and mighty God.

VI. *Our God is a consuming fire.* This evidently comes in as an additional reason to the preceding. And a most weighty and solemn one it is, though but little understood.

Let us observe the peculiarity of this expression. It is not, “God is a consuming fire.” Nor is it, “God out of Christ is a consuming fire;” for in truth there is no such being as a God out of Christ. But it is “our God is a consuming fire.” The fire, indeed, has not consumed us, but still it is consuming. The God with whom we have to do is a God who has saved us, yet still this very God whom we call ours is a consuming fire. Should we not, then, serve him with reverence and godly fear.

God is the God of salvation, yet he is a consuming fire. In him these things are combined and displayed together. The saved soul sees both these things in one. The very thing which shews him God as the God of salvation is the thing which shews him God the consuming fire. And on the other hand, the very thing which manifests God as a consuming fire is the thing which displays him as the God of salvation. He is not represented as possessing these characters separately to different classes, but as presenting himself at once under both; so that, looking to him



in this twofold light, the Apostle exclaimed, "our God is a consuming fire."

We can trace this double manifestation all along from the beginning. Look at Abel. He kneels before the altar on which the bleeding firstling of his flock is laid. In a moment fire descends from heaven and devours the sacrifice. That fire passes close by him. Yet he fears not. He knows that it will not reach him, for it is the lamb that attracts it. On that lamb it must descend—but descending on it he remains unharmed. And after the fire has consumed the victim, Abel can lift up his eyes to heaven without terror and say, "our God is a consuming fire."

In like manner we might trace this downward from altar to altar, from worshipper to worshipper, from Abel to Noah, from Noah to Abraham, from Abraham to Moses. Each altar speaks of grace, yet of fiery vengeance too. On one side of it is written SALVATION: on the other GOD A CONSUMING FIRE.

But look at the true altar. Look at yonder cross. Hear the cries which issue as the fiery wrath of Jehovah descends upon the sufferer. What does that mean! It means that God is a consuming fire, and yet that that consuming fire is finding vent to itself, so as to pass by us and leave us not only unharmed, but assured of the abundant grace of God towards us. It is when standing by that cross, and seeing the flames of wrath expend themselves upon Jesus, that we are made to see the character of God as the God of grace, and to say "our God." The fire that consumed him shows us how great is his hatred of the sin, yet how tender is his love to the sinner. The brightest display of his holiness is also the fullest manifestation of his love. So that that very object which wins our hearts and awakens our confidence, is the object which fills us with the profoundest reverence and godly fear. No one has such a view of the righteous majesty of Jehovah and his abhorrence of iniquity, as the soul that has found forgiveness at the Cross of Christ. And thus it is that he can say, "our God is a consuming fire."

Thus the consuming fire of which the Apostle speaks is not the fire which descended upon Sodom, nor the fire which consumed Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, nor the fire which so often smote the enemies of the Lord. These were terrible enough, but not half so terrible as the fire of the altar—the fire of Jehovah's wrath, which came down upon the head of his beloved Son. It is at the cross alone that we learn what Divine vengeance is. The others are but sparks from the furnace—this is the furnace itself. The others are but reflections of the lightning—this is the infinite thunderbolt itself. It is only at the cross that we really see God the consuming fire.

Yet this fire, in which the whole wrath of God was poured out, is the proclaimer of grace and salvation. When standing by the cross, what is it that assures us that there is no more wrath for us? It is just that we have seen the consuming fire descend upon Him who was laid as a sacrifice upon that altar. It is this that enables us to look up to heaven without a fear of wrath. Had that fire not descended—had we not seen it consume the victim, we should have been casting glances of infinite terror to these clouds which hung above us. We must have felt that they were charged with thunder for us—that they were as the quiver of Jehovah, containing his vengeful lightnings in their cloudy sheath. Till we knew that they were exhausted, that they had discharged their contents, we could not look up unalarmed. But having seen the consuming fire come forth—having seen it expand itself upon the cross—we can cast upwards a tranquil and loving eye, and send up along with our joyful glance the utterance of filial hearts, saying, “Abba, Father.”

The sword which was placed at the gate of Eden, to bar man’s entrance, was “a flaming sword.” It was the earliest proclamation to man that God was a consuming fire. It prohibited all access; nay, it threatened with immediate death any who should rashly seek to enter. But that flaming sword has been removed. Its fire has been quenched. The sinner may now go freely in. Nay, he is invited by God himself to enter. Nay, more, the highest wickedness of which he can be guilty, is just his refusing to enter. And how is this? Jehovah spoke and said to that flaming sword, “Awake, O sword, against the man that is my fellow.” The sword awoke, and smote the Son of God. But in doing so, it was quenched, and taken out of the way. It no longer came between the sinner and God. It was henceforth not to bar our access into Paradise, but to point the way, and to assure us of a welcome.

Thus in preaching God a consuming fire, we preach the gospel of the grace of God. “Out of the eater comes forth meat.” We can tell you of God’s holy love, and how that love has found free vent to itself. We can tell you how that love is now flowing like a stream from heaven throughout the manifold regions of our fallen earth, and how each sinner among you is invited to stoop down and drink of that river of love and life that is flowing past his dwelling. We can tell you of God’s willingness to save unto the uttermost, and we can invite you to draw near with a true heart, and in full assurance of faith. Far-off sinner, come! The message is to *you*; it addresses you by name; it breathes kindness and welcome in every word; it scruples not about your unpreparedness; it will admit of no delay. It does not say, after you have prepared

yourself, come ; after you have repented, come. It says, come as you at this moment stand—a sinner upon God's earth, not knowing but that another moment may cast you into an endless hell. Remember how the Lord himself has said, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

And now mark the sad and dread reverse. "Our God is a consuming fire." Words of inconceivable terror these to the stout-hearted sinner. The world has already seen one awful manifestation of this truth in the cross of Christ. It has yet to see another—in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death. It is that second manifestation that awaits the despiser of the cross. The saints have seen God a consuming fire, but that fire never reached nor injured them. Not one spark of it was permitted to alight upon them. Thou shalt also behold it, thou scorning unbeliever ; but thou shalt feel it, too. It will not pass thee by. It will descend upon thy head ; it will enter thy very vitals ; it will wrap thee in its endless folds of flame ; it will toss thee upon its burning waves. What a doom shall thine be, when thou leavest the pleasant earth, and goest down to the lake of everlasting fire !

Yet it is all thine own doing ! Thou art self-doomed, self-destroyed, self-tormented ! God opened to thee the gate of heaven and beckoned thee in ; but thou didst deliberately turn away, and go downwards to that prison-house of fire. Thy crime is deliberate rejection of the free grace of God—a rejection begun in infancy, carried on throughout life, and resolutely persisted in, till it has now landed you in the abyss of wrath and woe. The compassions of God towards you were as true as they were tender ; his entreaties and invitations were as honest as they were earnest ; but you had no ear for these beseechings — no heart for all that love. Oh what love might have all been thine ! And in that love what an inheritance ! And in that inheritance what a glory ! And in that glory what a joy ! And in that joy what an eternity of song and praise ! All lost ! All vilely cast away ! Oh misery and madness without a name ! The devils exult in it, yet they stand amazed at such desperate folly.

Not that it is yet too late, or that thy case is hopeless. Who says so ? Not God ; he still invites. Not Jesus ; he still beseeches. Not the Holy Spirit ; he still strives. Not angels ; they still watch for thy return, that they may rejoice over a new-born fellow-immortal. Not ministers ; they still point to the open gate, and proclaim free access and a joyful welcome. Not he who now addresses you ; he assures you that God has no pleasure in your death—that there is love enough in his bo-

som for you ; that there is room enough in his house and in his heart for you ; he takes the bread of life and reaches it out freely to your famished souls, that you may eat and live for ever ; he sets before you, and presses upon your acceptance a present pardon and a present salvation, without money, or price, or condition, or qualification, or delay. He tells you that there still is hope, so long as you are on this side of hell, and that not till your feet have crossed the threshold of the eternal prison, and you have heard its gate close heavily behind you, making damnation sure—not till then can your case be desperate, or you A LOST SOUL, for whom there is no gospel more—no cross, no Saviour, no love, no life, no heaven, for ever !

## SERMON CXVII.

THE TRIALS AND SAFETY OF CHRIST'S PEOPLE.

BY THE REV. PETER HOPE, B.D., WAMPHRAY.

(Preached at Canonbie on Sabbath, November 20. 1843, when the Free Church Congregation had been obliged by the Proprietor to assemble for worship on the Public Road.)

“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”—  
LUKE xii 32.

THE state of the Church of Christ in general, and of individual Christians in particular, is often in this life a state of disquiet and anxiety. The church here is the church *militant*, and the Christian life is called in Scripture a *warfare*. Assuredly men are not allured to become Christians by any prospects held out to them in the Bible of worldly comforts and advantages to be thus obtained. There is, indeed, a happiness in store for them even here, of which they largely partake, and which is never tasted by the unbeliever, and real Christians are, in truth, the happiest of men; but it is a happiness not produced by, or depending on the world, or the things of the world. There is, indeed, a peace and joy in believing; but it is a peace of conscience and a joy in the Holy Ghost,—blessings which the world can neither give nor take away.

Other creeds have held out the allurements of temporal advantage, and the enjoyments of sense to multiply converts; the gospel of Christ holds out no such bribe. It speaks of the cross, and tribulation, and persecution. It points to an arduous conflict with the devil, the world, and the flesh. It deals openly and honestly with men. It does not, indeed, tell them that *misery* awaits them on embracing it, even with respect to the present life. That would be far from the truth—it would be the very reverse of the truth. But it does clearly and distinctly announce, that “if any man will come after Christ, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Him.” It does clearly and distinctly announce, that “all who will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution,”—persecution in one form or other, modified

by circumstances, by the state of society, and the spirit of the age ; but still persecution, stirred up by the great enemy of their salvation. It gives a full and fair representation of what is to be encountered,—of all that is to be given up, and of all that is to be gained by embracing it. It admonishes all men to count the cost.

And the cost, when counted by the natural man, does not appear trifling. He is to give up the cherished pleasures of sin—to abandon his beloved lusts, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life ; he is to deny himself—to follow Christ through good report and through bad report—to endure reproach, and discomfort, and suffering, and, if need be, death itself, for his name's sake. Now, this to the natural man is no inconsiderable sacrifice, and the gospel never represents it as easy to be made. And what, he may ask, is to be gained by this step ? The answer is, Eternal life. Eternal life is to be gained, and eternal destruction escaped. This is the Gospel inducement, and will any say that it is not sufficient ? Would a never-ending eternity of happiness not amply repay a short life-time of misery ? But even this small price is not to be paid. There is no life-time of misery to be passed through by the Christian ? There may be a life of trial, of poverty it may be, or sickness, or persecution, or all these combined ; but still, in spite of them all, no life of misery. Misery has its seat in the mind, and in the mind alone ; and the state of mind of the true Christian, though a beggar, might well be envied by the unbelieving monarch on his throne. Believers have, it is true, their trials and afflictions,—and no affliction seemeth for the present to be joyous, but grievous ; but then, besides other consolations, there is ever gleaming before the eye of faith the bright crown of glory, the great recompense of reward. In their seasons of perplexity and distress, tumults and opposition without and fears within, they hear a voice speaking to them, in accents of love and encouragement, “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

In the sequel of this discourse, let us consider,

I. Who those are who are here addressed by the words “little flock.”

II. The admonition contained in the words “Fear not.”

III. The special grounds for taking courage here set before the flock of Christ.

First, then, who are the “little flock” who are here addressed ?

The individuals who heard these words from the lips of the Saviour were the little flock of his disciples, who, amidst all the scorn and hostility of Scribes and Pharisees, clung to Jesus of Nazareth as the

long-promised Messiah. But the expression before us must not be limited to that company, or to that age. Ever since, Christ has had a little flock in the world, and while the sun and moon endure, he shall not want a seed to serve him in the earth. He has such a little flock now, to whom he still addresses the same words, and the question is, Who are they that compose it? Nor can there be any difficulty or hesitation about the answer to this question. They are believers. These, and these only, are of his fold. These are the sheep; unbelievers are the goats. All who hear of a Saviour, and have the salvation of the Gospel offered to them, may be ranked, must be ranked, in one or other of these two classes. They either embrace the offer, or they do not embrace it. If they do, they are believers, and belong to Christ's fold; if they do not, they are unbelievers, and do *not* belong to it. And there is no middle course. This is the great and vital distinction which to the eye of God exists among men now; this is the great distinction which will be made hereafter. "In that day when the Son of Man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, and when all nations shall be gathered before him, then shall he separate them one from another as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats, and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on his left."

In other words, these are just the righteous and the wicked. "The wicked," we are told, "shall be cast into hell," and these on the left hand are they—"these shall go away into everlasting punishment;" "but the righteous"—those on the right hand—"into life eternal." And we repeat once more that these are precisely the two classes of believers and unbelievers, agreeably to that declaration, "He that believeth on the Son of God, hath everlasting life; but he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." My friends, I have dwelt upon this point the more earnestly, in order that you may clearly perceive that, however diversified the terms of Scripture may be, there are not in reality *two* classes of Gospel hearers that enter into heaven,—the righteous, or those who gain that inheritance by leading good and virtuous lives; and believers, or those who enter there through faith in Christ. No, there is but one class. The righteous are the believers, and the believers are the righteous. And so with the wicked and unbelievers.

It is the more necessary to have a clear and practical persuasion of the truth of all this, because we, in this professedly Christian land, are too ready to look upon ourselves as Christians almost as a matter of course. We were devoted to Christ by baptism in our infancy, we were called by his name, and are disposed, without much inquiry or concern, to

take it for granted that we belong to his flock. Now, there cannot be a greater delusion. Unless we are his, not in name only, but in deed and in truth, all our Gospel privileges will but increase our condemnation. It is not being born in a Christian land that will take us to heaven. "Except a man be born *again*, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Neither will a mere profession in baptism or in after life, secure our salvation. "He that *believeth* and is baptised, shall be saved; he that *believeth not*, shall be condemned."

But let us notice the expression "*little flock*." Christ's true disciples were a very little flock when these words were uttered. Are they a little flock still? What answer shall be given to this question? There can be no doubt that the faithful followers of Christ now in the world, if we look at them in themselves, and without reference to the whole family of mankind, and if we compare them with the number of his followers during his own sojourn upon earth, will in this view appear to be indeed a great multitude. And, blessed be his name! when we look around us upon the church and the world, and consider the efforts which have recently been put forth to spread abroad the knowledge of Christ, we may confidently say, that never since the day when he tabernacled among men has his gospel been so widely proclaimed as at the present moment; and perhaps we may venture to hope that the actual number of true Christians throughout the world is as great now as it ever was. But looking at the subject in another view, we are constrained to say that the genuine disciples of Jesus are, even in this day of gospel light, but a *little flock*. It is still true as it was of old, "that wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat; while strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

Were we to inquire, without presuming to judge the heart, what proportion of the human race can be said to belong, or to *appear* to belong to the true flock of Christ, we should be met at the very threshold of the inquiry by the overwhelming fact, that not a third part of mankind are even nominal Christians, dwelling where Christianity in any of its forms is professed, the great proportion of this world's inhabitants being yet in Pagan and Mahometan darkness. And of those who are *called* Christians, one half are under the blinding sway of Popish superstition, and a half of the small remainder are steeped in the ignorance and errors of the Greek Church. Now, though we are far indeed from saying that no true Christians are to be found in these communions, still when we consider the deadening and darkening nature of their manifold errors, and the pernicious influence which they are calculated to exercise, and which we know they *have* exercised upon the souls of



men,—and when we look at the actual state of religion in these churches, we are but too well warranted in saying that the number of genuine believers is, when compared with the whole population, extremely small.

And when we turn to Protestantism, comprising so small a proportion of the nominal Christianity of the world, and so much smaller a proportion still of the world's inhabitants; and when we contemplate the religious condition of the various countries in which it is professed; and even when we come to our own highly favoured land with all its gospel light, and all its purity of doctrine, and its high name for religion and morality,—what conclusion are we to draw as to the number of the faithful even here? Alas! alas! how much open ungodliness, how much unblushing disrespect to religion and neglect of its ordinances, which can leave no doubt in the mind of any that those who exhibit this character assuredly do not belong to the little flock of Christ. But let us narrow the circle still more. Let us leave out of view the multitudes who make not even an outward profession of Christianity, and whom no one would ever pronounce to be humble followers of Jesus. Let us take our church-going population, and, adopting the Bible as our standard of judgment, what are we to conclude respecting *them*? Here we approach what we said, and what we strongly *feel*, we would shrink from—judging the heart. But without doing so, we may ask if we are to conclude that all *these*, at least, are true believers? It is indeed, painful to say, but the truth must be spoken, and *this* is the truth, that even here we must make deductions, often large deductions, before the true disciples of Christ stand apart and alone. What the numerical proportion now is, after excluding the careless and the formalist, and all but sincere believers, we forbear to conjecture. The eye of God alone can clearly discern them. The Lord alone knoweth them that are his. But oh! my friends, are we not justified in saying, or can we shut our eyes to the fact, that the true disciples of Christ are yet but a “little flock?”

But, brethren, what is our object in this rapid review? Is it to harass and distress you, and cast a gloom over your spirits by presenting you with so dark a picture? If it should produce this effect upon your minds, we cannot help it. But this is not our aim. It is that we may be all stirred up to more anxious consideration, and greater carefulness in seeing to it that we, individually, are among the number of Christ's people, and may be led to give more diligence to make our calling and election sure, resting no longer satisfied with merely being like others, while they, perhaps, are treading the wide path that leadeth to destruction, and in which, if we accompany them, we must share their doom.

But if we do belong to the fold of Christ, let us see what awaits us. Let us listen to the Shepherd's voice, who tends his "little flock" with as much care as if their number was ten thousand times greater than it is. "Fear not," he says, "fear not, little flock."

We come, then, to consider, in the *second* place, The admonition contained in these words.

And, first, they are words of *warning*. They point to dangers and trials which might be fitted to appal the disciples' hearts. This is clearly implied in the very encouragement which they convey; for were there no causes of fear, there would be no occasion for encouragement. What, then, are the circumstances calculated to excite alarm? We shall not dwell on the hard lot of the early Christians. You know well to what fiery trials they were exposed, how fully verified were the frequent warnings which their Master gave them of coming evil, and how true it was that through much tribulation they were to enter into the kingdom of God.

But we dwell not upon the condition of the primitive Christians, as their situation was in many respects peculiar, and our wish is to come to the ordinary circumstances of believers in our own day. Are there any causes of alarm in their condition and prospects?

And, *first*, as to temporal things. In this respect we are placed in very different circumstances from the early followers of Christ to whom the admonition before us was originally addressed. In this happy land the profession and the practice of vital Christianity have not for ages endangered the life, or even, in ordinary cases, materially or at all injured the fortune. The time has been, indeed, when this was the case, and it is possible that the time may come again. And without intending to preach to the times in the usual acceptation of that phrase, and without wishing to allude particularly to passing events—but, on the contrary, wishing as much as possible to avoid any special allusion to them—still, when speaking from this passage of God's word, and in the trying circumstances in which we are this day assembled, it would be affectation to be altogether silent upon the subject. We say that the time has been when a firm adherence to Christ's cause has brought with it: temporal loss and temporal suffering, and it is possible that the time may come again. Instances of this, and not a few, have already occurred in our beloved land, and events have recently taken place and are now taking place around and among us which seem intended to warn believers to prepare for a season of trial. Certain it is that no one would now be surprised at occurrences which a few short years ago would have been regarded as events that were to be sought for and found only in the darker pages of history, among the gloomier spectacles of the past, and

which it seemed foolish to imagine would ever reappear in our enlightened age. Let us this day ask with all calmness and solemnity whether this be not so. And if it be true, let us not shut our eyes to the fact, let us look it stedfastly in the face, and learn the lesson which it is designed to teach. God grant that these events may be sanctified un to all of us! God grant that they may be the means of leading us to a deeper concern for our souls! God grant that we may thus be shaken out of our spiritual slumbers and brought seriously to consider whether we are indeed on the Lord's side, and have him on ours—whether we do indeed belong to the little flock of Christ, and have him for our shepherd! Let us enquire, not whether we profess to be his disciples, nor even whether we suffer for this profession, but whether we truly believe, and love and obey him.

But, brethren, even though God in his good providence should allay and disappoint the fears which many entertain, that days of trial and suffering for the church of Christ are approaching, still there are many trials to which the Christian is in this world exposed, of which a warning is given in the words "fear not, little flock." He is not in this life freed from the ills which flesh is heir to, pain, poverty, bereavement; nay, these are often sent as salutary corrections from the hand of his heavenly Father. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." But it is not less true, that "No affliction seemeth for the present to be joyous but grievous," and with these afflictions the believer is often visited. He is often stretched upon a bed of sickness; his lot is often found among the poor of the earth who earn with painful toil their scanty portion of this world's goods; often he mourns the loss of his dearest earthly comforts; and often, but for the presence of the holy Comforter, his heart would indeed be desolate. For these trials he is warned to look and to prepare. Both the word and the providence of God indicate that they will sooner or later, and to a greater or less extent, be the portion of his cup in this vale of tears.

But even though he may be subjected to fewer of these afflictions than many others of the children of God, there is one great struggle in which he must engage, the conflict with the King of Terrors. This terrible foe must be encountered by all, and in any circumstances, at the stake or on the battle field, or on the quiet death-bed surrounded by long-loved and affectionate relatives, *when looked at in itself*, there is something appalling to flesh and blood in the approach of death. But this must be met and endured by all, and the disciples of Christ are not exempted from the trial. Before they can enter Canaan they must face the swellings of Jordan." And of this also the words before us may be regarded as giving them warning.

But there are other trials of a spiritual kind which await them, and which they cannot escape. Many of the evils just referred to may affect our spiritual frame, and may therefore, in this point of view, be considered as *temptations* in the ordinary sense of the term, or in other words, trials of a spiritual kind. The frowns of hostile power, the loss of worldly substance, the pressure of hopeless poverty, the sharp distress of pain and sickness, the bitter pang of bereavement, all these may severely try the faith and patience of the saints. And there is not a little danger of their faith and patience failing in the hour of trial, and of their being thus led into sin. These evils, therefore, are to be looked upon by believers not only as salutary chastisements, but also as events which, if not watched, and improved, and sanctified, may become to the careless only new occasions of transgression.

But although, with respect to these trials of our faith, there is a loud call for watchfulness, and prayer, and reliance upon God for grace to help us in our time of need, still it is not here that the greatest spiritual danger is to be apprehended. It is not from this quarter that the most formidable and ensnaring temptations assail the heart of the Christian. It is rather in the hour of prosperity than of adversity, of health than of sickness, of joy than of sorrow, that the heart is most prone to be lifted up and forget God. It furnishes a sad and striking proof of the natural alienation of man from God, that it is when enjoying the greatest share of his temporal blessings that we are most ready to offend and grieve the bounteous Giver of them all.

But from whatever quarter they may come, certain it is that temptations to sin will continually assail the believer. All the admonitions of Scripture give warning of this, and also intimate that there is imminent hazard of his yielding to the Tempter. He is called upon to "stand in awe and sin not," to "resist the devil," to "walk circumspectly;" and the actual experience of Christians proves that these warnings and admonitions point to no imaginary danger. There is a sore struggle which the believer has to maintain with the corruption, and deceitfulness, and desperate wickedness of his heart within, leaguings with his spiritual enemies without; and the conflict is long and severe, ending only with the life of the Christian warrior, and the issue seems often doubtful, and he is frequently constrained to cry out, "Wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" For this incessant and vexing conflict the words, "Fear not, little flock," admonish us to prepare.

But we remark, farther, upon this head, that the words "Fear not," are not only words of warning, they are, more especially, words of *encouragement*. It is true that they speak of difficulties and trials, but they

speak of them in an accent of comfort and consolation. And it is important that Christians should take these two things together—should take the admonition in both these senses. It is important that they should practically act upon them both, and join trembling with their mirth, and hope and gladness with their trembling? This is important with regard both to temporal and spiritual trials. How often, in the midst of the sufferings to which the early Christians were exposed, must these cheering words of the Saviour have recurred to the minds of those who heard them from his own blessed lips, “Fear not, little flock.” He dealt faithfully with his followers in telling them of the trials which awaited them; but his warnings were ever accompanied with words of encouragement, and as their duty was to believe the voice of warning, so it was also to believe the voice of consolation. And he deals faithfully with his people still, and their duty is still the same, to look with the eye of calm belief both at the intimation of danger and the promise of solace and support. In the seasons of perplexity and distress which they are taught to expect, whether these be the common ills of humanity or troubles peculiar to them as Christians, and whether we regard them as temporal evils, such as sickness, bereavement, reproach, and persecution, or as spiritual trials, the temptations to sin which continually beset them—in all these ills of the flesh and of the spirit, the believer is not to despair; he is not to quail before the evils which surround him—he is to be of good courage and to fear them not. “Fear not, little flock.”

But how, it may be asked, can he do otherwise than fear? What is there to sustain his sinking heart? There are many causes of alarm—where are his grounds of hope and confidence? Where are the resources in which he is to trust? Do they lie in himself, in the ability of his own arm to get him the victory, in his own capacity of endurance, in his own strength to resist temptation and come off more than a conqueror? Is it from this source that he draws encouragement, and are the words, “Fear not,” only the whisper of self-confidence and self-complacency? Or is the balm poured in by another hand, and derived from a different quarter? Let us briefly examine this point, which forms the subject of our 3d head, viz.

The special grounds for being of good courage here set before Christ's little flock.

The first ground of confidence for true believers which we shall notice is to be found in the fact that they *are* the “little flock” here addressed. This little flock has a shepherd, and who is the shepherd of Israel? It is the Lord Jesus Christ, who redeemed them with his own blood. “I

am the good Shepherd :” he said, “ the good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.” “ I am the good Shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.” And having finished the work which was given him to do, the once crucified Redeemer ascended on high, leading captivity captive, was exalted to God’s right hand a prince and a Saviour, far above all principalities, and powers, and might, and dominion, and had all things put under his feet. This “ little flock” has a Shepherd who has all power in heaven and in earth,—what have they to fear ? O could we but at all times realise this delightful truth, what serenity would it infuse into the mind in the hour of trouble, and darkness, and dismay ! What consolation and support would it afford under the pressure of calamity and temptation, were we able not merely to repeat the words, but to *feel* the blessed truth that “ the Lord reigneth—the Lord reigneth !”

But is it indeed true, that our exalted Redeemer, as he has the power, has also the *will* to succour and protect his “ little flock” in the wilderness ? Ah, to doubt his willingness would be still worse, if possible, than to doubt his power. Who is it that addresses to believers the cheering words, “ Fear not, little flock” ? Is it not the Saviour himself ? Though he is now seated on the throne of heaven, he has not forgotten the sheep of his pasture. Is he not performing, on their behalf, all that remains of his mediatorial offices—teaching them by his word and Spirit, making continual intercession for them, ruling over and defending them, and restraining and conquering all their and his enemies ? Forget them ! O, a mother may forget her sucking child, but He will not forget *them*. He has graven them upon the palms of his hands, they are continually before him. And what comforting assurances does he give that He will be with them, that he is on their side, that their cause is his own ! “ In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, *I* have overcome the world.” “ I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you.” “ Fear not, for I am with thee ; be not dismayed, for I am thy God.” “ My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is perfected in weakness.” O, could we but stedfastly rely upon it, what a happiness to think that our glorified Redeemer, possessing all power in heaven and in earth, wields it on behalf of his beloved flock ! What a consolation to know that this great Captain of our Salvation is near in the dark and cloudy day, in the hour of distress and danger, and especially in the hour of temptation—that all events are under his immediate control, that he can make the wrath of men and devils to praise him, and the remainder of wrath he can restrain ! What a comfort to his people, both as individual believers and as members of the Church of Christ, to know that he is

made the head over *all* things to his Church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all! Surely the Church and people of the Lord Jesus Christ need not, in *any* circumstances, despair. Surely they ought not to faint or be afraid when they think who is upon their side, as well as who are against them. Surely, however waste and howling the wilderness may be, the "little flock" need not be troubled or terror-stricken, when they know that the good Shepherd is near. The more fiercely the storm rages, let them cling the more closely to Him; and then, in spite of all the hostility of those that trouble them, in spite of the devil, the world, and the flesh, this shall be their joyful song, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul; he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

Such are the ample grounds for encouragement furnished to believers by their being the "little flock" of Christ, and having him for their shepherd.

But there is in our text another source of consolation set forth in the word "Father." "It is your *Father's* good pleasure to give you the kingdom." What a relation is this to stand in to Jehovah! If we are indeed true believers in Christ, then "he who sanctifieth, and they who are sanctified, are all of one, for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren." "Go to my *brethren*, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." With Jesus as our elder brother, we are the sons of God; and "if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ."

Listen to the Saviour's earnest prayer to his Father in heaven for his followers, and not for his followers in his own day only, but for all who should believe on him through their word, for all his flock in all ages: "I pray for them, I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me, for *they are thine*. And all thine are mine, and mine are thine, and I am glorified in them." And what is his prayer? "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest *keep them from the evil*."

With Jehovah, then, standing to them in the relation of a father, and they to him in the relation of sons, what have Christ's "little flock" to fear? Will he suffer his children to be torn from him and destroyed? If they confide implicitly in him, will he suffer them to be tempted or tried above what they are able? and will he not with the trial and the

temptation make a way for their escape, that they may be able to bear it? They have now all the glorious attributes of the Almighty arrayed upon their side,—his power, his wisdom, his goodness, his truth, nay his justice itself, for he is faithful and *just* to forgive them their sins, and to confer upon them to the full all the blessings which Christ has purchased and paid for, and which it would be charging God with injustice to suppose him now to withhold. True, he may chasten them; but this is just a proof that he dealeth with them as sons, “for what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not?” He will make *all* things work together for good to those that love him; and, therefore, with God for their reconciled and loving Father, let the firm, abiding thought of every lamb in Christ’s “little flock” be, “If God be for us, who can be against us?”

But, finally, the more special ground of encouragement which our text affords to believers is contained in the full and blessed assurance, “It is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

There are two elements of encouragement combined in this precious declaration. There is, first, the value of the recompense of reward; and, second, the certainty of obtaining it. As to the first of these, the greatness of the reward, the word “kingdom” expresses it. For what is meant by “the kingdom” here spoken of? Obviously, the kingdom of heaven, with all its glories and joys. It is to this that the faithful people of Christ are hereafter to be welcomed. “Come, ye blessed of my father, inherit *the kingdom* prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

My friends, I need make no feeble attempt to set before you the blessedness that awaits the redeemed. We might cluster together the glowing terms which the inspired writers employ when speaking of this subject,—the thrones, the crowns, the white raiment, the melody of harps, the songs of triumph, the living fountains of waters, the tears wiped away by God himself, the fulness of joy, the perfection of holiness, the immediate presence of God and of the Lamb, and all this *for eternity*,—after thousands of ages have rolled away, the happiness only beginning—to be only beginning at the end of thousands of ages more. We might dilate upon all this, and still we must conclude in the words of the Apostle, “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.” But upon this we need not dwell. All think of heaven as a place of happiness and glory. But it is not, we conceive, by the contemplation of the exceeding *greatness* of



its delights that the humble believer is to be specially encouraged in his struggles here below. The eternal joys of heaven would seem a sufficient recompense, were they much less entrancing than they will be found to be.

The substantial and chief encouragement will rather be found to rest in the *second* of the elements which we mentioned as entering into the expression in our text, "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom," viz., the certainty of obtaining this inheritance. And when we think of who the Father here spoken of is, that it is the Lord Jehovah who doeth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, surely the words "It is your Father's good pleasure" should be enough to pour comfort and consolation into the Christian's troubled heart. For, if it is the Father's good pleasure, who shall thwart or baffle it? Who shall traverse his purposes, or stand between them and their accomplishment? The "little flock" of Christ are his own gift to the Redeemer, and under his own peculiar care. "My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all, and none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." They are the objects of his everlasting love, the partakers of his covenant blessings, the heirs of his heavenly kingdom. Through every trial and every temptation He will infallibly bring them to that glorious inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, and which fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for them.

O, then, brethren, if we are indeed Christ's people, let us be of good courage. We have him for our watchful Shepherd and our ever-present Almighty Friend. We have *his* Father for *our* Father; we have an eternity of unspeakable blessedness in prospect, and the faithfulness of the Omnipotent is pledged to our inheriting the kingdom, and all his attributes are engaged to secure it. In every season, then, of trial and temptation, let us go forward with firm and well-founded confidence,—confidence in our Saviour-God alone, and in no degree in ourselves,—confidence, not in order to relax our efforts, and thus be guilty of presumptuous sin, but in order to redouble them, stedfastly performing every duty in the face of whatever opposition, and resisting every temptation, enduring every hardship, and braving every danger—looking at all times to *Him* for grace and strength, and by his grace and strength vouchsafed to us, we shall be "more than conquerors through Him that loved us." Amen.

## SERMON CXVIII.

SANCTIFICATION BY BLOOD.

BY THE REV. THOMAS HASTINGS, WANLOCKHEAD.

“ Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.”—HEBREWS xiii. 12.

WE are informed in the preceding part of this epistle, that every high priest taken from among men must offer both gifts and sacrifices unto God; that the priesthood of Aaron did offer these, which, however, could not make him who performed the service perfect as pertaining to the conscience; and that Christ being come an high priest of a greater and more perfect tabernacle, did obtain eternal redemption for his people. Towards the conclusion of this epistle, and in the midst of his practical exhortations and impressive injunctions, the Apostle returns to this important subject which he had already discussed, illustrates the contrast of the sin-offering of the Jews with the sacrifice of Christ, and exhibits the harmony of the system of truth, first in a shadowy, and then in a real manifestation. But the Hebrew Christians, in particular, were liable to be drawn aside from the simplicity of the gospel, because of their fond attachment to the law of Moses, aided by the subtle arguments of Judaising teachers. Hence the inspired author of this epistle cautioned them against returning to their former bondage, for the Jews themselves must be converted to Christianity to obtain the benefit of that sacrifice which Christ had offered on the cross.

In the preceding verse we observe a commandment expressly referred to, as having been enjoined upon the Jews to burn the bodies of their sin-offerings without the camp of Israel. The design of this arrangement was to illustrate to the Hebrew converts the doctrines of Christianity, by leading the mind through the whole field of their own prophecies and ceremonies of worship, by inducing them to examine the typical system of ancient sacrifices, and by influencing them to consider why the crucifixion of Christ was without the gates of Jerusalem. “ Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.”

I. We shall endeavour to explain the principal emblems of the Old Testament, in illustration of the suffering of Jesus without the gate.

We are expressly informed that Christ was consecrated a priest after the order of Melchisedec, and not after that of Aaron. Now, priests offered both gifts and sacrifices, and their oblations could only make a typical atonement. Melchisedec, who lived four hundred years before the Mosaic economy, and to whom Abraham, the father of circumcision, paid tithes, was a priest to no particular people, and, consequently, he shadowed forth Christ as the Saviour of the Gentiles as well as of the Jews. But Aaron being the priest of the Jews only, had the High Priest of our profession sprung up after the order of Aaron, whose priesthood was expressly for the Jewish nation, none but the Jews could have obtained salvation by Christ. This, you may see, by a manifestation of Divine Providence, was typified when the first-born of the people of Egypt died, and the first-born of Israel were saved by the atonement of the Paschal lamb. The priesthood of Aaron, who was appointed to officiate to a people separated by the rite of circumcision, and sanctified by typical sacrifices, could not extend their ministrations to any other nation whatever. But the priesthood of Melchisedec was not confined to any nation—no particular people were presented to his peculiar ministration—his lineage was not marked on any record, and his office was not dated from any epoch of time. In this respect, you will observe, he was without father and mother and descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of years, but made like unto the Son of God, he abideth a priest continually.

Again, the Apostle having shown the inefficacy of the blood of bulls and of goats, and the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer to cleanse the conscience from dead works, points out the efficacy of the death of Christ to obtain eternal redemption for his people. And hence in an offering for sin blood must be carried into the figure of heaven, even into the holy of holies. Now, when these things were thus ordained, the priests always went into the first tabernacle accomplishing the service of God. But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the sins of the people. The Jewish tabernacle, then, may be representative either of heaven and earth, or of the Church militant and triumphant, or of the circumscribed dispensation of that economy. But when the termination of this era arrived, then Christ breaks down the middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles, and proclaims to the world, "Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." If the blood of the sin-offering on the great day of atonement was an atonement made for the high priest and the sins of the people—if this offering directed their views to Him from whom their life sprung, and recalled their faith to this atonement every year—well does it become every

sincere Christian to remember the death of Jesus, and to obey his dying command at least once every year, "This do in remembrance of me." The scape-goat made atonement for Israel, and while the blood of the other which was slain was sprinkled towards and upon the mercy-seat in the holy of holies, the skin and flesh were burned without the camp. And therefore this was a very remarkable type of Christ recorded in the book of Leviticus xvi. 20, 21, 22. For the great day of atonement two goats were provided four days beforehand. One of them was killed for a sin-offering, and the other was let go for a scape-goat into the wilderness. "And when Aaron has made an end of reconciling the holy place, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar, he shall bring the live goat: and Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness. And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities into a land not inhabited, and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness." Now, these two goats represent Jesus Christ. The one which was killed for a sin-offering represents Christ as dying, having satisfied Divine justice for sin; and the other, Christ as living, having risen again for our justification.

But, further, the sacrifices on the great day of atonement were distinguished far above all others, and accompanied with circumstances of peculiar solemnity. Their blood was carried within the vail, and sprinkled on the mercy-seat as the means of propitiating the Divine Being and procuring for the worshippers the pardon of sin committed by the whole nation through the preceding year. This type is also illustrated in Leviticus xvi. 16, "And he shall make an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins." The sin-offering, during the abode of the Israelites in the wilderness, was carried without the camp and burned; but when the temple was built, it was carried without the gates of Jerusalem. And, therefore, Christ, to answer the types more plainly and distinctly, was crucified without the gate. There is something very remarkable in the design of Christ's death here exhibited to our view. The sin-offering of old was only for ceremonial defilement; but the death of Christ really and morally sanctifies his own people, for he made a true atonement for sin, and qualified them for the service of God. As it was the great design of the sacrifices on the day of expiation to consecrate the children of Israel, so the great end of Christ's sacrifice is to consecrate his own chosen people, and that with his own blood. Let us therefore go forth unto Him without the camp, bearing his reproach. Let us follow Christ by renouncing all idle and useless ceremonies. Let us

renounce the pomp and vanity of this world, and follow the suffering Saviour without the gate. For his disciples must be content to be crucified to the world, and to suffer contempt and scorn, calumny and persecution, yea, even death itself, for the sake of his cause and interest; because all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

II. We shall now enquire who are those who are here called the people to sanctify whom Jesus suffered. When Abraham was called to sojourn in a strange land, it was promised that a seed to spring from him, like the stars of heaven for multitude, should be planted in it. God bestowed upon them the ceremonial institution of circumcision, and gave them a law which distinguished and separated them from all other nations on the face of the earth. For not only did the rainbow of a faithful promise surround and enclose them, and exhibit the great variety of their privileges, but the most wonderful and miraculous providences continually proclaimed their character. Prophets, also, were sent from time to time to correct their errors and to stimulate their endeavours, and to proclaim that there was a chosen people for whom a Saviour was destined. Thus Isaiah, when prophecying of Messiah, says, "I will give him for a covenant to the people, and a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel." The Israelites were called, in contradistinction to all other nations, "the Lord's peculiar people," because of their separation to God, and of their enjoyment of his institutions and privileges. And the prophet Jeremiah declares, "After those days I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah, not according to the covenant which I made with your fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; but this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and I will be their God and they shall be my people."

Now, the people for whom Jesus suffered are typically represented by the ancient Israelites. For the death of Christ was that of which the annual sacrifices were emblematical. After having offered himself a sacrifice for sin upon the cross, he entered into heaven with his own blood, there to present it before the Father on behalf of his people who should for ever enjoy the benefit of his atonement. They could only obtain an interest in it by the exercise of faith, consequently all who should trust in the sacrifice of Christ, would participate in those benefits, from which the High Priest himself should be excluded if he rested merely in the outward services which he performed, without looking through them to the great, the true atonement. And therefore Christ, who took not on him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham,

supports two forms of character—being the representative of God to us, and the representative of man towards God. And from the character which in law the Mediator sustained, and the fact that, by his obedience and sufferings, he accomplished the salvation of sinners, we may infer that the satisfaction of Christ magnified the law and made it honourable. And He who knows the end from the beginning knows that there are, among those under the dispensation of grace, a definite number, in whose stead Jesus became surety and substitute—that number God the Father gave to his Son in the covenant of redemption; so that for this people, and for them alone, did Christ, in the eye of the law and of his Father, suffer. “Thou shalt call his name Jesus, because he shall save *his people* from their sins.” “He laid down his life for the sheep.”

But, further, we address you who are separated by the appointment of God to have the blood of the great sin-offering sprinkled upon you—that blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, which cleanseth from all sin—you whom Christ, in the covenant of redemption, was appointed to represent, whose debt he has actually paid to divine justice, and who, therefore, believe in his name; for you who believe shall be saved; and to you who believe, Christ is precious, the chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely. In this way, the gospel is glad tidings to believers, because it convinces them of their real state by nature, informs them of the way of recovery, and holds out to them the sure hope of immortal happiness and glory. For Christ has paid the debt due by them for sin; he has satisfied the law they had violated, and atoned for the offences they had committed. He hath removed every obstacle which impeded their reconciliation. He hath pointed out the way to the celestial paradise, and opened the everlasting gates. For the whole tendency of the gospel is to show to you the efficacy of Christ's sufferings and death to take away sin, and the blessed privileges which his blood has purchased. It is the healing remedy provided by the grace of God for the moral diseases of man. He sent his word, and healed you. The call of the gospel, which you heard and obeyed, is also to all who come within its sound. The proffer of the water of life is made to all who hear the joyful sound, that impenitent sinners may be left without excuse. “If I had not come,” said the Saviour, “and spoken unto them, they had not had sin, but now they have no cloak for their sin.” For this purpose of saving sinners, then, Jesus suffered without the camp of Israel, and without the gates of Jerusalem. He suffered on Golgotha, the scene of the death of those who were excommunicated and cut off from Israel. He trode the wine-press of his Father's wrath alone, and of the people there was none with him. “Is he the Saviour of the Jews only,

or also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also." Yes, O Blessed Saviour, we are thy people by external profession—we entreat thee to make us thine, not by the will of the flesh, nor by the will of man, nor by our privileges, but by the water of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit; by the water and spirit of life. For when we are born again, "it is not by might nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord."

III. We proceed to show that Jesus sanctifies the people with his own blood.

The sanctification which is here spoken of as effected by the death of Christ, signifies purification from guilt, and a title to the possession of heaven. The Israelites were purified ceremonially by their passover, which was instituted in commemoration of the destroying angel passing over those houses which were sprinkled with the blood of the paschal lamb, and slaying the first-born of the Egyptians. It was instituted to commemorate their deliverance from Egyptian bondage. They sojourned in the wilderness, living on heavenly food, and never had a fixed habitation until they entered into the promised land. Hence, the true Israelites are sanctified by their great High Priest, who was anointed with the oil of joy above measure. "Ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of your God." "For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one." Now Jesus, for the sake of his people, in his estate of humiliation, suffered hunger and thirst, watching and cold, slander and reproach, temptation and death. But the sons of men, who looked only upon the outward appearance, rejected his claim to be the Messiah, condemned him for blasphemy, and pierced his hands and his feet, by nailing them to the cross. He bore the sins of his people in his own body on the tree. And it is impossible to account for the sufferings and death of Christ upon any other supposition than that of his being the surety of those whom he sanctifies with his own blood. The dignity of his character gave infinite value to his death, as a real sacrifice for sin, and his sufferings were what the expiation of guilt demanded. For "God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Again, from the contrast between the purification of the Jewish economy and the Christian dispensation, we observe that Christ obtained the remission of the sins of his people. The sacrifices of the Jews did make an atonement, as is evident from the whole tenor of Scripture. When the sinner brought his offering, it was accepted, and freed him from any punishment which the Jewish law could inflict. He was no longer legally unclean, although Divine justice might not be satisfied, nor the sinner saved. Whatever was the pollution contracted or vice committed, these sacrifices

ceremonially purged it away. This atonement, however, was only typical and ceremonial, and Christ is the substance to whom sacrifices were all directed. But, in all their sacrifices, the believing Jews beheld the Messiah—the Lamb of God who was to come and to take away the sin of the world; therefore, the death of the Mediator of the New Testament was the only expiation for the sins of transgressors under the Old. Christ, our New Testament Passover, is sacrificed for us. We have already pointed out that both priesthoods are ordained for men in things pertaining to God, and both offer gifts and sacrifices. The sacrifices of the one may satisfy to the purifying of the flesh, but cannot purge the conscience. The Jewish economy, then, hath waxed old, and vanished away; but the other cleanseth the conscience, for Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many, and by his one offering of himself, he hath for ever perfected them that are sanctified. Now, if the sacrifices under the law made a typical atonement, and if Christ be the great antitype, consequently it will follow that he made a real atonement. Is not the reality signified by the sign? Is not the image reflected in the mirror? Is not the substance shown by the shadow? So the types by ceremonial expiation prefigure Christ, and present him to you as making a true atonement for the sanctification of his own people.

But further, we observe that, to accomplish their sanctification, Christ, bearing his cross, went forth without the gate unto a place which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha, where they crucified him. It was, most probably, that very spot to which Abraham was directed, and where Isaac the type was laid upon the altar. And as also the sacrifice for sin was burned without the camp, therefore, Jesus, to fulfil the type, suffered on this place without the gate. As the expiatory sacrifices were burned without the camp when Israel was tabernacling within it, and without the gates of Jerusalem when they dwelt in the city; and as the High Priest carried the expiatory blood into the holiest of all on the great day of atonement, so Christ, with his own blood, entered into heaven, and by it obtained the pardon of sin, peace of conscience, and joy in the Holy Ghost, for all who believe and obey the Gospel, and come unto God through a Mediator; and, therefore, the death and intercession of Christ are the procuring cause of salvation to all his people. But they will be of no avail to the impenitent and incorrigible; yea, rather, it will prove their condemnation, that light hath come into the world, and that men loved the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil. And, as no part of the sin-offering was to be eaten, but all must be burned without the camp, so the Gospel feast, which is your New Testament Passover, is the fruit of the sacrifices, which none have a right to enjoy who do not acknowledge the sacrifice itself. That Christ, therefore, might appear the real antitype of



the sin-offering, and might sanctify the people with his own blood, he conformed himself in every respect to the type, and suffered without the gate.

IV. The sanctification of the people by the blood of Christ raises them to immortality and glory. Your salvation is the offspring of mercy, being not by the works of the law, but by the free grace of God. For it is just as much the sovereign grace of God to renew you, as was the manna which fell around the tents of Israel the free gift of heaven. It is just as much the grace of God which raises in the heart a lively faith, as it was his power which at first made man out of the dust of the ground. The one is just as much the power of God as the other, for we are his workmanship, created again in Christ Jesus. The new man after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. The promises and mercies of God are all unmerited, yet none of them are made but in and through Christ, and the blessings which you enjoy are the reward of his work of obedience. If they be not, why is heaven expected for Christ's sake? "For you are begotten through a lively hope to an inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, and fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for those who are kept by the almighty power of God through faith unto salvation." You approach God in and through Christ as the way, the truth, and the life. You rely upon his name as the sure foundation of your hope. You believe in him to obtain mercy to pardon, and grace to help you in every time of need. And, consequently, before you can enter into the holy of holies, you must be entirely clothed with the righteousness of Christ, who is the end of the law for righteousness to every one who believeth,—and we know that he who believeth hath not only renounced one sin, but all—that the whole family of vice is expelled—and that there is an entire renovation in the whole man, old things having passed away, and all things become new.

Again, it appears from Scripture that Christ prepares a title to heaven for his people, which proves that he has purchased them with his own blood. "Ye are bought with a price." And hence you see the necessity of this exhortation, "Feed the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood." Christ hath purchased to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. For he shall see his spiritual seed born and brought up in the faith, educated and brought through in the faith, and finally received into glory. Consequently we infer, that if the Church be the body of Christ, then believers are the members. "If Christ be the vine, then ye are the branches." "If he be the foundation, then ye are the building." He hath redeemed you from the bondage of sin, and reinstated you in the privileges of liberty. "Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you

free." But for what end and purpose did Christ purchase the church to himself? That he might present her as holy and unblameable before his Father in love; and that he might make you, his people, kings and priests unto God. And, therefore, it is expressly said, that when he who is your life shall appear, you shall also appear with him in glory. But Christ was not exalted into heaven, until by his death he had sanctified all whom he represented for entering into that glorious rest. And as the High Priest of the Jews could not enter into the holy of holies until he had first sanctified himself, and all the people whom he represented, by the efficacy of sacrificial atonement; so Christ is said to be sanctified with his own blood. For the Scriptures always connect together, as reason and consequence, as cause and effect, the humiliation and sufferings of Christ upon earth, and his exaltation and glorification in heaven. The God of our Fathers raised up Jesus whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand "to be a Prince and Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins."

But, further, Christ hath entered into heaven through the merit of his sufferings and death to sanctify you in the capacity of your representative. For you are planted together with Christ in the likeness of his death, and raised together with him in the likeness of his resurrection. Christ then is risen from the dead as the first fruits of that resurrection, of which all are to partake, and therefore, if you rise not, neither is Christ raised. And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain, our preaching is vain, and ye are yet in your sins. For if in this life only ye have hope in Christ, ye are of all men the most miserable. But ye are buried with him in baptism unto death, and raised with him unto newness of life; because he is your forerunner and representative entered into heaven for you. If Christ, then, who was anointed with oil above measure, presents its streams as issuing from him and flowing into his members; if your union to Christ be described as implying the reception of nourishment from him, as resembling the union of the branch to the stock; if it be portrayed as that vital connection which subsists between the members and the head; if it be compared to a sustaining influence like that of the foundation of the building; and if these representations do respect your internal holiness,—then it follows as a natural consequence, that he both possesses your sanctification in his mediatorial person and communicates it to you. For the root has the vegetative juice which invigorates the branches, the understanding has the plan of operations which the hands execute, and the foundation is laid corresponding to the superstructure to be reared. "From whom the whole body, fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure

of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."

V. We now proceed to make some practical improvement of this subject suited to your present circumstances.

1st, The first promise to fallen man, presents Christ as wounding and being wounded, and by that means accomplishing his salvation. The promise to Abraham which preserved his faith and excited his joy and consolation was, "that in his seed should all the families of the earth be blessed." When the first-born of Israel was dedicated to the Lord as the type of him who is the first-born of every creature, they were sanctified by the blood and death of those victims, which have been pointed out to be the figure of the real sacrifice of the Son of God. Abraham therefore saw the Messiah afar off and was glad. Job could say experimentally, I know that my Redeemer liveth. The prophet Isaiah sees him prolonging his days, and the pleasure of the Lord prospering in his hand. "As a lamb led to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." Daniel also foresaw kingdoms rise and fall, and the present restoration of the holy city overturned, and the sanctuary defiled and destroyed. He saw the sacrifice and the oblation of Israel to cease for ever. And, notwithstanding he also sees an end of sin, reconciliation made for iniquity, and an everlasting righteousness brought in, the vision and the prophecy sealed up, and the Most Holy anointed, and the Messiah cut off, but not for himself. Then the prophecies reach their fulfilment, when the morning star ushers in the clear day of the Sun of Righteousness. Hear the voice of one crying in the wilderness, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord; make his paths straight." Then John the Baptist fills the minds of the people with the wonders of faith and love, saying, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance; but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to loose; he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire." At the baptism of the Saviour, a voice from heaven declared, "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased;" and John directs the attention of his disciples towards him, and says, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Observe him bleeding and dying, and see, flowing from his pierced side, blood to pardon, and water to cleanse you. The sanctified soul will view him with the eye of faith as the most agreeable object, in whom it takes peculiar delight. "Look unto me," says he, "and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth, for I am God, and besides me there is none else." And Jesus, with the twelve, on the same night in which he was betrayed, attends upon the passover, where the lamb was sacrificed, in commemoration of the delive-

rance from Egyptian bondage. Afterwards he takes bread, and sets it apart from a common to a sacred use, and also the cup, saying, "This cup is the new testament in my blood, shed for the remission of the sins of many," and instituted in commemoration of a still greater deliverance—a deliverance from a state of sin and misery, and a restoration to peace, comfort, and happiness.

2d, Your sanctification from the guilt of sin, by the death of Christ, is an honour, and a blessing, which he commands you to keep in perpetual remembrance. "This do in remembrance of me." This is your duty here upon earth, to commemorate the dying love of your crucified Redeemer, until you arrive at the heavenly Jerusalem, and sit down at that table which shall never be drawn. "But I say unto you," said the Saviour, "I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." Is not the cup of the New Testament Passover, then, filled with the blood of a real atonement—the blood shed for the remission of sin? He was sacrificed for you, his people. He is the propitiation for your sins? In him ye have redemption through his blood. He bore your sins in his own body on the tree, and now once in the end of the world hath he appeared, to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. He gave himself for you, to redeem you from all iniquity, and to grant unto you the forgiveness of all your sins, according to the riches of his grace. Hence, the death of Christ, which is unlike to that of every other person, is delineated in every page of the sacred volume, and is called a satisfaction, a sacrifice for sin, and an atonement—a propitiation, a redemption, and a price—and is made the great subject around which the songs of the Church militant and triumphant revolve, which, for ever ascending, swell their notes to the highest strains of praise, "Alleluia! the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." This is that which brings heaven and earth into perpetual fellowship, and one eternal family. "For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; of whom the whole family in heaven and earth are named."

*Finally,* We infer that the attention of the righteous inhabitants of the universe, is engaged by the words he has spoken, and the institutions appointed—by the prophecies uttered, and the ordinances instituted. And hence, to commemorate his death, another great day of *your* New Testament Passover is coming round. On the next Lord's-day, you will have another opportunity of celebrating the wonders of redeeming love in this holy ordinance, which so remarkably illustrates the Divine justice, interprets the ritual of Israel, and is a key to the predictions of revelation. It justifies the solemnity of your religious assemblies, instructs you to hear with reverence of that blood of sprinkling which speaketh

better things than that of Abel, and shows to you the meaning of the song of the Church triumphant, "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof, for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us by thy blood." Yes, O intending and believing communicants, you must be sprinkled with the blood of the great sacrifice, which was offered up through the eternal Spirit, without spot, unto God; that you may be purged from dead works to serve the living and true God; and that you may become a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a peculiar peop'e, to show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into the marvellous light of the gospel. For you shall in a little time appear in heaven, among those who have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Now may the preaching of the everlasting gospel, and the gospel feast, of which you have so near a prospect, prove effectual, through the blessing of God, more and more, for confirming your faith, inflaming your love, and enlivening your hope, that you may be strengthened and enabled to pursue your journey through the pilgrimage of this world with patience and perseverance, till, having passed through the dark valley and shadow of death, you arrive at the promised land of rest, where, face to face, you shall see the Beloved and Bishop of your souls, and shall bear your part in that grateful and triumphant song, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and made us kings and priests unto God, to whom be glory, power, praise, and dominion for ever and ever." AMEN.

## LECTURE XVIII.

## THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE.

BY THE REV. THOMAS DYMOCK, PERTH.

“ And the Jews’ passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and found in the temple those that sold oxen, and sheep, and doves, and the changers of money sitting : And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen ; and poured out the changers’ money, and overthrew the tables : And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence ; make not my Father’s house an house of merchandise. And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.”—JOHN ii. 13-17.

THE event here recorded is not to be confounded with one of a similar nature, which is mentioned by all the preceding Evangelists. The cleansing of the temple to which they allude took place on the *last* occasion when our Saviour observed the passover—this again was on the *first*—so that we are to understand that he acted in the same way at the beginning and end of his public ministry ; showing, in regard to the professing worshippers of God, how quickly and easily abuses connected with the services of the sanctuary once reformed could be fallen into again, and shewing, in regard to Christ himself, that he was unchangeable—that the same zeal for the glory of his heavenly Father which now animated him, continued to glow in his breast with equal—with unabated warmth.

By the time John wrote this gospel, the ancient sacrifices and feasts observed by the Jews in conformity with the law of Moses had been abolished, and in speaking therefore of the passover, which had been superseded among Christians by the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, he calls it “ the Jews’ passover.” At the time, however, to which he here refers, the ceremonial law was yet in force, and therefore we find Jesus, whom “ it behoved to fulfil all righteousness”—to render to the law of God an implicit and perfect obedience—we find him going up from Galilee to the holy city, with the view, no doubt, of not failing in any requirement, and most likely also that he might avail himself of the opportunity that might there be afforded him of advancing his kingdom among the multitudes that would then be assembled in Jerusalem. The passover, as it was then celebrated, being now abolished, the example of Christ in the particular instance before us is not literally

to be followed—the observance even of any particular solemnities at that season of the year is not binding on any of his followers. The time has now come when neither in Jerusalem nor Samaria *only*—neither on Zion nor Gerizzim *only*—may men worship the Father. The spiritual observance of the holy feast—the Christian passover—may be gone about with as much solemnity and with as much acceptance at any time or in any place where the people of God assemble—in spring, or summer, or autumn, or winter—under the thatched roof, or by the mountain's side—in the sequestered vale, or by the shore of the sea, as well as in the most gorgeous edifice, where

“Through the long-drawn aisle and fretted vault,  
The pealing anthem swells the note of praise.”

To observe particular seasons, therefore, such as Easter and the like, or to imagine that it is only in certain places that the public ordinances of religion can be acceptably performed, may do for the Jewish, but not for the Christian economy; and it is difficult to discover why they, who fancy themselves bound to observe any particular times or seasons, do not think themselves equally bound to observe all the ceremonial law of Moses. Be it ours to rejoice, that God is a Spirit, and that all worship him with acceptance who “worship him in spirit and in truth.”

Our Saviour never entered either into that part of the temple called the holy place, nor into the holy of holies, inasmuch as none went into the former of these but the priests, nor into the latter but the high-priest only once a-year. Now, Christ was not of the tribe of Levi, but of the tribe of Judah—therefore neither priest nor high-priest in the Jewish sense. On coming, however, into the outer court, called also the court of the Gentiles, within which was first the court of the Israelites, and afterwards the court of the priests, before reaching the holy place—coming into the first or outer court, Christ observed that merchandise of various kinds was actually transacting within the walls. There were the sellers of oxen and sheep and doves, animals to be offered in sacrifice to the Lord. Many of the Jews coming to Jerusalem from distant places, would find it inconvenient to bring the required sacrifices along with them, and must therefore provide themselves nearer the temple (according to the law, at Jerusalem, Deut. xiv. 24-26). On pretence of supplying such, the practice of selling within the walls would in all likelihood be attempted to be justified by those engaged in the traffic, and by the priests, whose gains would be increased by the price they would receive as rent for the ground. The pretence was frivolous, however, because, though the market might require to be near, it might yet have been without the walls. In addition to the dealers in cattle, there were also changers of money. Judea being at this time

tributary to the Romans, the coin of the Roman empire was current in it, and it was the business of these money-changers to give current for foreign money, and to furnish the worshippers with half-shekels, their tribute to the temple, in exchange for Roman or other coin of greater value, themselves receiving a profit on every such transaction.

From such things taking place, Christ was led to say that his Father's house had been made "a house of merchandise." In speaking, however, of the same parties on another occasion (Mat. xxi. 13), he declared that they had made the temple "a den of thieves"—from which expression we may learn that avarice was gratified, and that fraud was committed, in the deeds of which he complains. The holy place was profaned—the place of prayer—the place which God had chosen to set his name there; and we have little difficulty in believing that the worldly and irreligious men who could not only insult and scandalize the devout Gentile proselytes, by converting their court into a cattle-market and a place for money-changing—men who could forget the reverence due to Zion, in the gates of which the Lord delighted—we have little difficulty in believing that, if they dishonoured God, they would defraud man, just as we are easily persuaded of them who live in the violation of any one of God's commandments, that they would commit other sins to which they were tempted, or for which they had facilities. Now, the position of these traffickers was favourable to the practice of fraud and extortion. Those who sold the animals for sacrifice, conniving with a secular and sordid priesthood, would induce sales at exorbitant prices, by alleging that the animals had been already inspected by the priests, and pronounced free from blemish—not unlikely they would assert, that if the sacrifices were purchased there, they would be all the more acceptable to God. Add to this, that both they and the money-changers might easily take advantage of the necessities of the people, having almost, if not entirely, in their own hands commodities that were essentially requisite for the worshippers.

Our Lord could not look unmoved at such a scene as this, where, instead of beholding devout and pious worshippers, he saw only an abominable commerce carried on by formal or superstitious professors engaged in an attempt to over-reach one another. When, therefore, "He had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise." The cords of which the scourge was made were most probably twisted rushes or reeds—now used as an emblem of authority, while, at the same time, from the very weakness and fragility of the instrument he employs,



we may see more clearly that divine and miraculous power must have been put forth to accomplish his end. Here one single individual, unknown and unaided, drives out from the courts of the temple a multitude of men, who were strong in their influence with the priests, long possessed of their present privileges, united by a common interest, whose pride and avarice, one would think, would have led them to offer all possible resistance, with an amount of cattle of which we may form some idea by knowing what the Jewish historian tells us, that at one passover no fewer than two hundred and fifty-six thousand and five hundred animals were offered in sacrifice; the men not only retreating before Him, "who had come suddenly to his temple," but retreating abashed and confounded, without daring to utter a word in their own vindication, or make a single attempt to retain their position. This cannot be accounted for but by regarding it as a miracle. It may be true that the consciences of the dealers reproved them—it may be true that the Jews were in expectation of the great Prophet, and knew not at that time but that Christ might be he—it may even be true that a commanding dignity in Christ's appearance overawed the beholder; but no one of these things will of itself explain the wonderful proceeding—nothing but the interposition of a power above human can account for it.

The miracle was certainly great, and it was wrought in a manner and towards an end not usual in the miracles of Christ. When he exerted his divine power while on earth, it was almost invariably in deeds of mercy and benevolence, and we wonder at the appearance he here presented. We can scarcely recognise Him "who was meek and lowly;" "who did not strive nor cry, whose voice was not heard in the streets;" "who gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair;" "who hid not his face from shame and spitting." Whence then was the change? How was it, that when no personal insult or injury could provoke him, even to the utterance of a hard word, he now had recourse to this violent procedure? Ah! it was because the honour of his Father was at stake—the honour of Him in doing whose will he took delight. It was because the temple was habitually profaned—because the world had been carried within the Church—because there was buying and selling, and the practice of extortion and fraud, where the hearts of men should have been set on God and engaged in his service, and whence no sound should have proceeded but the voice of supplication and the song of praise. It was this that fired him with a holy indignation—it was this that made the lightning of his eye to be intolerable even in his abasement—it was this that made it well that he should be angry.

Does the history of the visible Church in every subsequent age de-

monstrate that abuses, gross as those practised by the Jews at this time, though differing perhaps in form, are liable to creep into it—abuses connected with government, and discipline, and ordinances—“false prophets, through covetousness, with feigned words, making merchandise of the people”—men seeking and obtaining the priest’s office “for a piece of bread;”—here the buying and selling of patronages and presentations; there the buying and selling of indulgences to commit sin, and of pardon for sins already committed; here Cæsar’s throne erected within the walls to the degradation and dishonour of the throne of the Lord of the temple—the secular power controlling where the word and will of God should be the only law; and elsewhere, nay, almost everywhere, the too indiscriminate admission of persons into the Church and to the enjoyment of sealing ordinances? Are these things so? Then let us remember that Christ has lost none of his indignation on account of such sins. He is even manifesting his displeasure on account of them. His word and his providences agree in shewing his will concerning his Church—just as of old he instructed as well as punished. He said, “take these things hence,” at the same time driving out with the scourge of small cords. All this he did as Lord and Heir of his Father’s house, as King of Zion, on his own responsibility, and in the exercise of his own power. Let him then be acknowledged as supreme; and as no partial reformation will satisfy him—as he will have every abuse removed, even beyond the precincts of his temple—let us seek to discountenance all that would offend him—let us be fellow-workers with him in promoting the purity of Zion—let it be our desire and prayer that our own “holy and beautiful house” may be so freed from every corruption, so purified by his dispensations towards it—dispensations that are gentle yet expressive of displeasure, like the using of the scourge *only* of small cords—that God may be glorified in us, and that the Messenger of the Covenant may remain, where we believe he now is, within our walls.

Numerous and gross as may be the abuses in the visible Church at any time, Christ’s power may be seen to be adequate to the removal of them all. We might have thought that the Jewish temple, at the period to which reference is here made, was almost beyond purification. And yet with what speed and with what ease does Christ remove all that was offensive! So now, if, on looking around, we observe much heresy, much corruption in worship, and government, and discipline, and are ready to ask, when will the Church “arise and shine, and put on her beautiful garments?” let us remember that he who is her King and Head has all power in heaven and earth, and that when it is his will, when he himself engages in the work, he can effect the most thorough reforma-

tion, even by the employment, as in this instance, of very feeble and apparently inadequate instrumentality. Let us seek to enlist him in this great object, that he may "arise and plead his own cause," and then shall his Church, purified and united, be made to shine forth "fair as the sun, and clear as the moon, and terrible as an army with banners."

But while we may see in this action of our Lord his interest in his Church generally—the holy jealousy he entertains as to its purity—his anger against abuses in it—and his design to purify it of these, though it be by the instrumentality of afflictive dispensations—may we not gather from it what more nearly concerns us as individuals, viz., his displeasure even now at the frequenting of his courts from improper ends, or under the influence of improper thoughts and feelings. We are aware that the act has reference to the Church as a body, and that the passage may not therefore have literally any particular application to individual congregations, or individual places of worship, under the Christian dispensation—neither do we claim for our churches what some unwarrantably do for theirs, that they are consecrated places; but we are safe in asserting that they should be entered for worship under the influence of holy desires and for holy ends, and that the sins of the sanctuary are very heinous and offensive in God's sight. To us God yet says of the sanctuary, "My house shall be called the house of prayer." Each professing worshipper is to reverence the sanctuary as being such. You should regard it as the "house of God"—the place where "his glory and beauty are seen"—where, though everywhere present, he yet especially manifests himself. You should "reverently enquire in his temple." You should come to the house of God in obedience to the Householder—you should come to behold him and to meet him—to seek his glory and to obtain his blessing. But it is the "house of prayer" also, and you should see to it that it is a house of prayer to you. It is not so, if you do not pray. It is not enough that you hear. It is not enough that one should pray for all. All must pray. We must all join in heart, otherwise to as many as fail in this, the church will not be the house of prayer. Now, are none abusing this holy ordinance of public worship? Do you remember on each returning occasion where you come, and for what end you ought to come? And when in the house of God, are you occupied in his worship? are the services of the temple your delight? Were the Lord coming, how would he find you? Would he find you waiting on him? Would he find you seeking after him? Thus it may be with some, but with many it is otherwise. Are there none whose look of unconcern and wandering eye betray the listlessness and indifference that are within? Are there none who bring the world into the sanctuary—whose hearts even in this

holy place go after their covetousness—who are pondering schemes of worldly pleasure or profit while sitting before God as his people sit? You who act thus are the buyers and sellers and money-changers of the Christian temple; you are in danger of being visited by the Lord of the temple; you are in danger of being called by him to your account, for profaned Sabbaths and dishonoured sanctuaries; and if he was terrible even with his scourge of small cords—if the abashed and dismayed multitudes fled before him—oh! what must be the majesty of his appearance, when he shall come in his glory, and what the infliction of his anger when “he shall shut and no man open,” and when formal and worldly professors shall be for ever excluded from his presence.

How great the power which love of gain exercises over them who are possessed by it! Here we see it impelling the Jewish priests, whose professed reverence for the temple formed part of that righteousness on the ground of which they expected to stand accepted before God, to let out this very temple as a market-place; and we see it impelling the traffickers themselves to forget the sacredness of the ground on which they stood—to forget how near they were to the symbol of God’s presence—to lose sight of the worship of God altogether, in a base attempt to “make gain of godliness.” Does the bare mention of such deeds shock the feelings of professing worshippers? But the love of gain has lost none of its force. It is a passion that rages still, and that is exhibited in no less great enormities. Does it not lead multitudes to trample on all the ordinances of religion? Does it not lead to the neglect of the Bible and of prayer? Is it not the occasion of leading many to absent themselves from public worship and from meetings for devotional exercises? Whence the flagrant desecration of the Sabbath in the pursuit of business—in the receiving and answering of letters—in the plying of railway-trains, and of steam-vessels, and of mail coaches on this holy day? Whence all this, but that the gain of Sabbath desecrators may be advanced? Yes! it is the very same spirit that actuated the cattle-dealers and the money-changers of old—the spirit that made them to prefer their merchandise to their religion, to serve mammon rather than God; nay, to serve mammon at the expense of God’s honour, to put the god of the world before the God of the Bible. Every act by which a requirement of God is set aside or trampled upon, and by which dishonour is done to him or his law, in order that worldly ends may be served—every such act is a direct imitation of the parties here offending. It is the same Lord to whom the insult is offered. He resents the insult as keenly as he did of old, and if he does not for a time visibly interpose in the execution of his judgments, he will nevertheless come ere long to all. He may come suddenly, and in the end it will.

be seen that all shall be excluded from the courts of the heavenly Zion "that defileth, or worketh abomination, or maketh a lie."

The heart of each believer is already the temple of God, and the heart of every individual is claimed by him for this end, to be dwelt in by his Spirit, "My son, give me thine heart." Ye who are his people beware of defiling this temple. Beware of entertaining and harbouring thoughts, or of cherishing desires, which are inconsistent with your state as believers. If corruptions once subdued return upon you—if the power of sin rises within you—if you have become worldly and polluted—let your earnest prayer be, "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin." Seek that God by his word and providences may sanctify you wholly. Nay, let it be your wish that rather the Lord should visit you with his rod than that your heart should be filled with such wickedness as is fitted to drive himself away from you. You, again, to whom the Lord has not yet come, let me exhort to invite him to take up his abode within you. Where he does not reign, Satan has his seat. Would you leave off the service of the world and of sin? Are you willing to be made pure? Come to Jesus. The devil will own no other authority than his who drove the traffickers from the temple. No other can cleanse you. No other can save you. But, coming to him, he will deliver you; he will "come in and sup with you;" and he will make you a pillar in the heavenly temple not made with hands, where carnality, and temptation, and sin can never enter.

The disciples, no doubt amazed at the proceedings which they now witnessed in the temple, and struck with the difference in the demeanour and doings of Christ from what they had been wont to observe, would for a time be altogether at a loss how to explain it. On reflection, however, a passage occurred to their minds from the Old Testament Scriptures which threw light on what was otherwise inexplicable. In the 17th verse it is said, they "remembered that it was written, the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up."

These words are to be found in the sixty-ninth Psalm, and if we see that they recurred most seasonably to the minds of the disciples, let us see also from their experience the propriety of our searching the Scriptures, and bearing on our memories the words of inspired truth. Had they disregarded the Old Testament writings, as too many, although they have the opportunity of attending to them, disregard both the Old and New Testaments, they would have continued in doubt or in ignorance in regard to the explanation of the important event that had just taken place. And such is the ignorance of all who know not the Scriptures, which alone can "make them wise unto salvation."

We are not to wait till we imagine that we have a full spiritual per-

ception of Bible truths, before we get them imprinted upon our memory. It is plain that the disciples had read these words often before, and that it was not till now they learned their real import. What an argument for early inculcating on the minds of the young the contents of God's word ! Some would have them left untaught, until they could comprehend the meaning of all that they read or commit to memory. But let us see from this passage, that the seed is to be early sown, and that in God's time and way it may be expected to take root downward, and bear fruit upward. And how should the young themselves be encouraged from this instance to treasure up the very words of Scripture in their memory, in the hope that what they "know not fully now, they shall know hereafter"—that the Spirit and the providence of God will bring to light what now appears to be dark, and mysterious, and unintelligible.

How often is it with the people of God, as it was with the disciples on the present occasion ! In their enlarging experience, they come to see a force and a beauty in the language of inspiration, to which before they were entire strangers. It becomes a wonder to them that their eyes had been so long holden, and that they could hear, and read, and repeat portions of Scripture, without seeing in them what appeared afterwards so manifest. The way, too, in which the light comes to be thrown on Scripture, is very often just as was in this case, viz., by observing the doings of Christ. It was his act that recalled and explained the verse in the sixty-ninth Psalm to the disciples. So it is often by observing the acts of Christ in his holy providence, even now, that we come to have "the eyes of our understandings opened to see the wonders of his law." This holds true, both as it respects his public and more private dispensations. How often do his afflictive dispensations, for, instance, show to his people the point and application of statements and promises in the Word ! And to bring forward what must be known to all, how often, during these late years, in the events that have befallen us as a Church, have saints been constrained to say, that Psalms and other portions of Holy Writ, have been read by them with double emphasis, and have been seen by them to be more pregnant with meaning and application, than before they could have conceived ! How often have they remembered, like the disciples, that thus and thus "it had been written !"

And if the works of Christ reflect light upon his word, it may as truly be asserted that the right understanding of his word, leads us to admire and acquiesce in his works. The cleansing of the temple, when imperfectly understood, may have appeared to the disciples to have been a harsh and severe procedure ; but the remembrance of Scripture

removed their doubt and darkness, calmed their troubled breasts, and no word of murmuring, or disquietude, or alarm escaped their lips. Would we acquiesce in his dealings? Would we be still and adore, even when his judgments are abroad? Would we see his faithfulness, and truth, and mercy in every dispensation? Then let us look on providences in the glass of the Word. Let us see his motives and designs in all he does, even when his hand is raised to smite. Then shall we say, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth good in his sight." "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints."

The words quoted from the sixty-ninth Psalm, were primarily used by David. In one sense they were applicable to himself, but they only met their complete fulfilment in Him, of whom David was but a type—the Son and Lord of David. It was in Christ emphatically, that there was the zeal of God's house. Zeal implies intensity of affection for some object, manifesting itself in an earnest regard for the honour and interest of the object loved, and so, also, in opposing whatever is contrary to the object. Now, God was the object of the Saviour's love, and his zeal was shown in a regard to his honour. He was zealous in all that concerned God—He sought his glory in every thing—it was his meat and drink to do God's will. Here, however, it is *zeal of God's house*, or, *zeal for God's house*, that is spoken of, confining it chiefly to what was connected with the worship or service of God in the temple. From his zeal, he was grieved and enraged at the profanation that he found prevalent, and led to seek and accomplish its purification. This zeal was so great, that Christ had said in prophecy, "it hath eaten me up." It was to purchase, to reform, and purify and perfect the Church that he had come—it was the great end he had ever in view—it was for this he humbled himself—for this he denied himself—his strength and spirits were employed and spent in it. His zeal for the house of God—his earnest desire for its honour, "glowed like a secret flame in his bosom;" it must either get vent, or it would consume and overwhelm him; and, at last, like the Divine fire that fell on the sacrifices of old and burned them up, it led him to give his soul an offering for sin, that the glory of his heavenly Father might be displayed in the salvation of sinners.

The disciples saw how extremely applicable to Christ, the Son of David, the phrase was in the case before us. They said within themselves, as it were, "We have heard of the zeal of God's house eating one up, but now our eye seeth it." What holy grief and indignation must at this time have appeared in the countenance of Jesus! His zeal for the ordinances of God, had been manifested in other ways, and at other times. It appeared in His waiting upon them, delighting in them, ex-

citing others to an attachment for them, but, on this occasion, it especially led him to reform and purify. What a high and holy example to the ministers of religion! In the removal of all abuses, in the fulfilment of their ministry in all its parts, his motives are to be ours—zeal for the honour and glory of God—a desire that his worship should be pure, such as he can himself approve—a seeking to promote whatever honours God, and a hatred of all that dishonours him. This is the only true principle of reformation, the only zeal that is according to knowledge.

Let not ministers alone, but all who profess to love the Lord, be fired with zeal for his glory, avoiding sin in ourselves, discountenancing and condemning it in others, according to our circumstances and position, aiming after and praying for the preservation of God's ordinances in purity, planning and employing means to promote the universal coming of Christ's kingdom among men. Oh, how little is there of such zeal as this! How little grief for the dishonour done to God in abounding iniquity! How few feel it as a sword within their bones, when His name, and word, and ordinances are profaned! How little love for his courts! How little care for the purity of his house! Whence all this lukewarmness? Whence is it that so many are neither cold nor hot? Is not this the reason that few can, like Christ, call the house of God, "*my Father's house.*" Yes; this is the explanation of the prevailing indifference—the want of sonship, and so the want of filial love to God, which originates zeal for his house. Seek the dignity—seek the happiness of being God's adopted children, and experiencing these, you will feel yourself willing to spend and be spent in his service.

You who are already his: live in remembrance of your relationship towards him. If you would feel when the reputation or honour of earthly parents is concerned—if you would resent any affront offered to them, or rejoice in what pleased them, and promoted their credit among men, how much more should you feel what concerns your heavenly Father! How should it be your aim to live to him, and not to yourself? How should you grieve because of sin, and long for the time when "the glory of the Lord shall fill the whole earth?" Let the mind of him who is your elder Brother, be ever seen in you, and rejoice that the Messenger of the Covenant will yet so come to his temple—that he will so refine, and so purify, that thenceforth "the offering of Judah and Jerusalem shall be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years."



## LECTURE XIX.

THE SINS OF THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES.

BY THE REV. WILLIAM WILSON, CARMYLE.

But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men ; for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer : therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, you make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves. —MATTHEW xxiii. 13-15.

THE Scribes were doctors of the law, who read and expounded the Scripture to the people. They were possessed of the key of knowledge, and occupied the seat of Moses.

The Pharisees were a kind of separatists among the Jews, as their name indeed denotes. They were signalized by their great zeal for the traditions of the elders ; by the strictness with which they kept minute ceremonial observances ; by an affectation of peculiar sanctity, which was displayed even in the manner of their dress ; and by the unqualified spirit of self-righteousness and spiritual pride by which they were animated.

When Jesus speaks to these men, he no longer wears his wonted aspect. His language is not that of compassion and tenderness, but of stern denunciation. " Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ! Ye fools and blind, ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell." Such denunciations would have been less remarkable from the mouth of some stern prophet of wrath sent to warn a guilty world ; but they are very awful as uttered by the Prince of Peace. He who could say to the woman taken in adultery, " neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more"—he whose charities were so ample as to give utterance to the invitation, " come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"—he who was sent to seek and to save the lost, whose ear was open to every complaint, whose heart was touched with sympathy for every sorrow, who went about continually doing good, who invited and was followed by publicans and sinners, who was the personation of mercy and love—he has no word of forgiveness

or of comfort, or even of exhortation, to these men. He only speaks to them of unutterable woe. Their doom is already fixed. They had refused to know the things that belonged to their peace, and now they are hid from their eyes. There is nothing in the future for them but woe, ever, and for ever—the damnation of hell.

It is important that Jesus should be presented to us under these two aspects, of forgiving mercy and of relentless wrath, in order to stimulate hope and to repress presumption. He is able and willing to save to the uttermost; the chief of sinners may be rescued by him from deserved wrath; those that come he will in nowise cast out;—but by this very display of infinite mercy he seals the condemnation of those who will not come. While God reveals in Christ his love, he also reveals his holiness and justice. When Jesus stood in the room of sinners, it was impossible the cup of wrath should pass from him, and it must be poured out upon all who have not sought and found refuge in him.

In the text Jesus proceeds to indicate the grounds of that woe he had denounced upon the scribes and Pharisees. He points out to the people the crimes with which they were chargeable, and the hypocrisy of their conduct. It is worthy of notice, that he does not content himself with speaking to the guilty parties alone. He unveils their character before the face of the world. His words, as stated at the commencement of the chapter, are spoken to the multitude, and in their presence. The position of the parties rendered this necessary. They were deceiving the people by their pretences, and, therefore, the people must be warned against them. Here, then, we have an example to guide us in the reproof of sin. Whatever kind of dealing may be proper in the case of private parties, when the guilt attaches to public characters, and especially to public teachers, they are neither to be let alone nor privately censured. The people must be warned against their errors, and for this end the viciousness of their principles, and the hypocrisy and selfishness of their character, must be fully exposed. The Pharisees engaged in most of their religious acts that they might be seen of men; and it was nothing more than an act of simple justice to enable men to see them as they actually were. The same thing is true of all pretenders in religion. Truth and justice, and love for the souls of men, alike demand that such pretences should be made manifest.

The first charge adduced against the scribes and Pharisees in the text is, that they shut up the kingdom of heaven against men—that they neither entered into it themselves, nor suffered those who were entering to go in. No charge against a class of public teachers of religion could be more grave and solemn than this. The very purpose of religious instruction is to open up to men the kingdom of heaven, and to incite them

to press into it. When, therefore, it is alleged of these teachers that they shut up that kingdom, they are not only accused of neglecting the great designs of their office, and failing to perform the very thing they were set apart to accomplish, but they are charged with utterly perverting the objects after which they were bound to aim;—they not only failed to open, but employed their energies to shut the kingdom of heaven against men.

When the question is put, what methods did they take to accomplish this? the easiest and perhaps the most natural answer would be, that it was by their extraordinary strictness and outward purity. The Pharisees are uniformly set before us in the gospels, as men who stood apart from the grosser vices of the age. They fasted often—made broad their philacteries—were frequent in prayer in public places—and gloried in the multitude of their alms-deeds. The mass of the people were regarded by them as little better than heathens. They abjured the society of such men; and one special ground of offence against Jesus was, that he did not imitate them in this respect. It might be readily presumed, then, that by such austerities as marked their outward conduct, they rendered religion altogether so repulsive as to deter the common people from inquiring into its claims, rather than to invite them to submit themselves to its authority. Thus, it may be supposed, they shut up the kingdom of heaven against men.

It is notorious that such an accusation as this has been always preferred against the pure ministers of a pure religion. Wherever the Word of God has been proclaimed in its fulness—the humbling doctrines it contains made manifest—the holiness of God and the utter depravity of man declared—it has been imagined that the old crime of the Pharisees has been acted over again, and that such teachers are guilty of shutting up the kingdom of heaven against men. In particular, in our own day, and in our own land, this accusation has been brought against the Free Church, whose people and ministers have been broadly denounced as Pharisees. This accusation has been chiefly grounded on the knowledge and belief that the Free Church has manifested a peculiar strictness both in her doctrine and administration; that she has excluded from her communion men of impure life; and in her teaching represents the way to heaven as very narrow. Such an accusation, however, it is plain, cannot properly be laid against her, unless it can be proved that she represents the way to heaven as straiter than God has made it, and that she refuses to own as disciples of Jesus those whom Jesus himself would rejoice to acknowledge. The duty of the minister is to declare the truth as he finds it in the Bible, and to act upon the directions he has there received. In thus preaching and acting, however, many may be shut out from the kingdom of

heaven; it is not he who has closed its gates against them, but God himself.

But the supposition is very far from being correct, that the Pharisees were accused of shutting the kingdom of heaven against men by the strictness and austerity to which they pretended. We shall discover the real grounds of the accusation by comparing the text with the parallel passage in the gospel according to Luke. It is there said, Luke xi. 52, "Woe unto you lawyers, for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye enter not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered." The way, then, in which they shut the kingdom of heaven against themselves and others, was by taking away the key of knowledge. This key had been put into the hands of the scribes, or lawyers, that they might use it for the display of all the treasures of Divine wisdom and knowledge; this key they had taken away. It was the instrument by which the kingdom of heaven was to be opened to men; and by taking it away they had shut the gates and kept out both themselves and their blinded followers.

When we regard the accusation in this light, we can scarcely fail to bring it home in all its severity to the Papal Church, as the representative, under the Christian dispensation, of ancient pharisaism. That Church has denied the use of the Bible to the people, and has thus taken away the key of knowledge. Its priests, instead of declaring the whole counsel of God, present to men a series of imposing traditions. They have shut up the kingdom against themselves, and those that are entering in they hinder. If any of the people discover a Bible, read it, and begin to apprehend its truths, he is prevented by the most stringent means from prosecuting his inquiries. He is deprived of the Bible, and deterred from the paths of Divine knowledge by the most terrible threatenings. Hence Popery is a kingdom of darkness, and superstition, and cruelty. They have followed in the footsteps of the Pharisees, and have outdone them. And if in the New Testament we find the most awful denunciations of Divine wrath reserved for those who, among the Jews, obscured the light of heaven, and shut men up in the dark dungeons of superstition and ignorance,—so also, in its prophetic language, we find a reservation of the full phials of the Divine indignation to be poured forth upon their modern representatives. The doom of Babylon is the great theme in the future history of the earth; and this is the heaviest charge against her, as of old against the Pharisees, that, sitting in the temple of God, she hath exalted herself above all that is called God,—that she hath shown herself to be God, in presuming to withdraw from men his testimony and to substitute her own. This is the foundation of the whole popish system. It demands not only that men should receive the traditions of which it is composed, but even, when the Word of God is in

question, it denies that there is any reason for believing it, excepting the testimony of the Church. And thus, so far as the truths of the Bible are known at all, they are made to rest, not on Divine, but on human authority. God is not permitted to utter his voice to men at all; the Church interposes, and pretends that it is her authority alone that can give power and sanction to the Word of God.

We have said that the Romanists have outdone the Pharisees. We perceive them both travelling on the same road, and both lying under the dark cloud of the same woe; but the Pharisee stands still when he has reached a certain stage of advancement, the Romanist presses on to the end of the journey. Romanism is Pharisaism perfected. We may expect, however, to find in the history of Christianity various less perfect forms of the same evil, and to detect the Pharisee under the mask of other and less hated names. In order to this, let us endeavour to ascertain the precise position of the Pharisee, and the place which he assigned to the Word of God. Let us observe how he used the key of knowledge, and by what precise instrumentality he shut up the kingdom of heaven against men.

The Pharisees did not deny men the use of the Bible. They did not conceal the knowledge of its contents. The people heard it read from year to year in their synagogues. It was explained to them, and their attention solicited to its truths. How, then, could it be said that they had taken away the key of knowledge? The answer to the question is to be found in the fact, not that they withheld the word of God, but that they made the commandment of God of none effect by their tradition. They refused to acknowledge the fact that God is the only teacher and director of his Church. They added to his word instructions of their own. And in thus teaching for doctrines the commandments of men, they made their whole worship vain. This was the error and the crime of the Pharisees. The commandments of men were made by them of at least equal authority with the commandments of God. Hence, though the word of God was retained, it became ineffectual, and their worship being corrupted by the admixture of what was human, became altogether vain. It is not difficult to perceive how such results necessarily follow from a submission to the commandments of men in what relates to the service of God. In receiving such commandments, God and man are brought upon the same level. It may be that man is elevated above his true position, but it must follow that God is ejected from his throne. The Divine authority, if it is to be preserved at all, must stand apart from and be superior to all other authority. The claims of God are paramount, and so soon as they cease to be so, they cease to be Divine. In other words, God is no longer God—his worship

is rendered vain—and his commandments become of none effect. Thus the key of knowledge is altogether taken away, and the kingdom of heaven is shut against men.

In this estimate of the Pharisaic crime, it is plainly of no consequence what were the peculiar traditions by which such results were accomplished. The crime is not one of degree or of outward circumstances. The fact of their teaching for doctrines the commandments of men, constitutes the essence of their sin. It is not material to inquire how many commandments of men they dignified by an equality with the authority of God, nor what the nature of these commandments were. The fact that the commandments of men occupied such a place at all vitiated their whole doctrine and worship, deprived men of the key of knowledge, and shut up the kingdom of heaven against them. Such a Church ceased to be a blessing, and had become a curse to the nation. It was a Church not to be reformed but to be destroyed. It was rotten at the very heart, and nothing remained for it but woe.

Having thus ascertained the precise character of that sin of which the scribes and Pharisees were guilty, it follows that the same sin, attended with greater or less aggravations, attaches to every Church which submits to or imposes the commandments of men, in that province within which the authority of God should alone be acknowledged. Such a sin, it is obvious, lies very heavily at the door of the Establishment in Scotland, in the constitution and administration of which we cannot fail to recognise a very close resemblance to the Jewish Church, such as the Pharisees had made it. They boast that they have the Bible, that they read it, and preach its doctrines to the people. All this the scribes and Pharisees did. But they have admitted the authority of men to direct and sway them in administering the affairs of the Church—in determining under what circumstances the people shall have a pastor, and with what powers the pastor shall be invested. The Pharisees also submitted to the authority of men within their church, and hence incurred the woe denounced against them in the text. And just as in their case the undue elevation of human authority made void the authority of God, so in our own land, where the same principle is acknowledged and acted upon, we are certain that the authority of the Bible has ceased to be revered, and the Divine commandments made of none effect. Such a Church has taken away the key of knowledge, and under pretext of guiding men to heaven, shut it up against them. Its ministers refuse to enter in themselves, and those that are entering in they hinder. They constitute the greatest barrier in the way of the advancement of vital godliness, and of the entire surrender of men to Jesus Christ.

But the text is pregnant with instruction and admonition to all the professed disciples of Christ. It impresses upon us the doctrine that the kingdom of heaven is opened by knowledge. This is the key that unlocks the celestial gates. We cannot obtain an entrance to it in any other way. The lock will not yield to any other power. Not that all kinds of knowledge are equally available. This is life eternal, to know God and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. To be ignorant of Christ is to be shut out of heaven. To know Jesus Christ is to open up the kingdom of heaven. This is the one thing needful for the Church. Hence we find the Apostle, in discharge of his high commission to the Gentiles, determined to know nothing among them but Jesus Christ and him crucified. To exhibit Christ is the faithful minister's duty; to receive Christ is to the people life from the dead. All other possessions and accomplishments are vain without this. The highest gifts, the most shining acquirements, cannot bring us a footstep nearer heaven. Nothing else avails to open up the kingdom to men but the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

From the text also we learn this doctrine, that the ministers of the Church have in a certain sense the power of shutting up the kingdom of heaven against men. They are set up as lights of the world. Their business is to instruct the ignorant. If they neglect the duties or pervert the designs of their office, how are men to acquire the knowledge of the truth? Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Ministers, then, like the Pharisees of old, shut up the kingdom of heaven against men, when they fail in rightly dividing the word of truth—when they do not speak as ambassadors for Christ, and shun to declare the whole counsel of God. They thus ruin and destroy souls. Blind perhaps themselves, and leading the blind, both fall into the ditch. God and Christ, to be savingly apprehended, must be apprehended as they are, and they cannot faithfully be exhibited otherwise than in the fulness in which they are revealed in the word. Ministers, moreover, shut up the kingdom of heaven against men by the unfaithful administration of the government and discipline of the Church. To endure open and known sin within it is to make God the minister of sin, and to make its government bend to the laws of policy is to destroy the authority of God.

From the doctrines set forth in the text, let us lay to heart the following practical instructions:—

1. Let us learn to read the Bible, and to listen to its truths, in the assurance that our eternal destiny depends upon the knowledge of them. The lessons and doctrines of the Bible are frequently profitless, from our not perceiving our personal interest in them. They are God's

message to us about a matter of unspeakable concern. Here mistakes may prove fatal to us for ever. We may have a key in our hands, but what if it be not the key which opens up the kingdom? With what solemn reverence, then—with what diligent inquiry—with what earnest prayer should we enter upon and prosecute the acquisition of this knowledge? Nothing else can concern us so nearly, or has such weighty interests dependent upon it.

2. Let ministers also learn their proper vocation as porters to the kingdom of heaven, and let them beware of handling the word of God deceitfully. Their employment is to use the key of knowledge; their object the saving of souls by knowledge. However tender and affectionate they may be, with whatever zeal they may labour, all their efforts will be vain unless they be directed to the single object of putting into the hands of their people the key of knowledge. They have an ample field of labour in presenting before men the knowledge of Jesus Christ and him crucified, in endeavouring to win the reluctant ear to attend to this great theme, and, as in Christ's stead, beseeching men to be reconciled to God.

Let us now proceed to examine the second charge which Jesus brings against the scribes and Pharisees. It is conveyed in these words—"Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer; therefore, ye shall receive the greater damnation." The crime of the Pharisees was not one, but manifold, and Jesus, in faithfulness, accumulates his charges against them. Lest for a moment they should forget the heinous character of these charges, he recapitulates with each the coming doom which awaited them. It is as if he would intimate, that as their sins were very great and very inexcusable, so the curse which would fall upon them would be heavier than others would have to endure. He proclaims a woe for every separate sin; and all unused as he was to such language of denunciation and wrath, he will not cease from the employment of it, but again and again takes it up under varied forms of expression, till, having accumulated upon their heads all the guilt perpetrated by the Jewish nation, he also concentrates, as it were, the whole fury of the divine anger upon their devoted heads. There is here nothing but woe heaped upon woe, as crime is added to crime. And yet with melting tenderness and poignant grief are the woes announced. The wrath is the jealousy of unrequited love: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not. Behold your house is left unto you desolate."



Hear it, and be terribly afraid, O sinner, dwelling in a valley of vision, and in the enjoyment of gospel ordinances. God speaks to you now in the beseeching voice of mercy. He addresses you with accents of the most winning tenderness. But if you will retain your enmity—if you will not come—if you turn away from him who now speaketh—if you will not flee to the open arms of Jesus now, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? Love scorned, its proffers rejected, will kindle into quenchless and devouring anger.

This second sin which Jesus charges against the Pharisees is of a very aggravated kind. It is devouring the houses of widows. Not contented with making void the commandments of God, these men were guilty of the most hateful practices. Having usurped a treasonable authority in divine things, their lives were characterized by acts of atrocious oppression and cruelty. Insinuating themselves into the confidence of the weak and the defenceless, they made their high religious profession a covert for the basest covetousness. They become robbers of the widow and the fatherless.

Such wickedness of conduct might have been expected as the sure result of the corruptions they had introduced into the Divine worship. Purity of faith is the surest guardian of integrity of life. On this subject great mistakes are prevalent. It is supposed to be of little consequence what a man believes, if his outward conduct only can be kept free from reproach. But how can the conduct be clean if the heart is impure, and nothing can purify the heart but faith. All history attests the correctness of this view. It is the method of God's procedure with men: For "even as they did not like to retain the knowledge of God, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity." Such men did the Pharisees become, because they had obscured and perverted the knowledge of God, and the results of such a course are uniformly the same. A right belief is the precursor of a holy life. An erroneous faith is the parent of impurity. The forms of wickedness may be varied, but it will exist, and in some way develope itself.

In the case of the Pharisees the wickedness was peculiarly hateful. The sin of which they were guilty was devouring houses, or, in other words, involving families in ruin, by appropriating and devouring the substance which belonged to them. But this sin was accompanied with a threefold aggravation. *First*, The houses they involved in ruin were the houses of widows. Comparatively defenceless, and liable to deception, their very helplessness should have constituted their strongest

protection. God, moreover, had cast the shield of his authority around them, and pronounced a curse upon those who should do them an injury. "Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that work grievousness which they have prescribed; to turn aside the needy from judgment, and to take away the right from the poor of my people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless." In the face of such a sanction the Pharisees devoured widows' houses, and, therefore, fell under the curse. *Secondly*, Their sin was yet farther aggravated, by being committed under the pretext of religion. They committed robbery under the guise of piety. *Thirdly*, They made an extraordinary profession of religious zeal. They not only prayed with a view to the more easy perpetration of robbery, but their prayers were long. Widows were their easy dupes. They could entertain no suspicions against men who prayed so long; whose lives seemed so much devoted to God. It has been supposed by some that they made these men trustees of their property, or in some way gave them power over it, trusting that it would be securely kept, and well husbanded for the benefit of their houses; that the Pharisees made it their own, abused the confidence reposed in them, and ruined those defenceless beings whom they had duped. Such a supposition is by no means probable. The Pharisees could scarcely have perpetrated crimes which were so odious, and must have become so public, and continued to retain that authority, and respect, and influence, which they had among the people. It is much more likely, that by their high-sounding profession, they obtained entire control over such persons, and persuaded them, as Papists have frequently done, to make a free gift of their whole property to the sect, as a meritorious deed which would merit and secure their salvation.

The hypocrisy of the Pharisees was thus made apparent. Their actions and their professions did not harmonize. They made a gain of godliness. The word of God has noted it as one of the marks of a hypocrite, that he should lead captive silly women. 2 Tim. iii. 5, 7— "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof, from such turn away: For of this sort are they which creep into houses and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts; ever learning, and never able to come to, the knowledge of the truth." Thus we are directed to one of the marks which indicate the mere pretender to godliness, and by which we shall be able to detect and expose the hypocrite. For the pretender in religion, having necessarily some selfish object in view, and not being animated by a love of the truth, may be expected to turn his profession to the best possible account. And whether for the purpose of gratifying his vanity, of acquiring power and influence, or of increasing wealth, he will always find his readiest in-

struments in silly and restless women. They will share with him their wealth, if they possess it; they will become the most active promoters of his good reputation, and gratify his self-esteem with the most willing and hearty adulation. Every age furnishes examples of such a course of action among high pretenders to religion, and our own is by no means destitute of very flagrant instances of it.

Hence, too readily, among despisers of religion, the reproach has been taken up against the true and living Church, that its most active promoters, and most zealous adherents, are women, and that the prayers of its members are only for a pretence. Surely it would be to infer rashly to conclude, that because the ministers or members of a Church were signalized by fervent and frequent prayer, and because devout and honourable women, not a few, were among its most zealous friends, such a Church was guilty of the Pharisaic crime, and justly lay under the reproach and the woe denounced in the text. Let us examine and see.

No one can read the personal history of Jesus without perceiving how, in the days of his earthly ministry, he had among his most honoured and endeared disciples devout women not a few, whose rich gifts he did not despise, and whose devoted love he did not spurn. Who was it that blamed the expenditure of a very precious box of ointment? The twelve, who had not yet learned how precious Christ was; but the woman poured it freely on his head, as a testimony of her adoring affection, and the approval and reward of the deed, as declared by Jesus, was, that "wheresoever the gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this that the woman hath done be told for a memorial of her." Nor did Jesus condemn liberality even in widows—in the very poorest. Witness his approval of the donation of the poor widow, who cast into the treasury all that she had, though it was only a mite. How singular that this instance of most extensive and enlarged liberality should have been perverted into an example and excuse for the most stinted charities! How often have men claimed the credit of bestowing the widow's mite for some object of Christian philanthropy, when they were giving what could scarcely be missed out of their abundance! The poor widow gave all that she had, and let no one claim the credit of her simple generosity till he has imitated her example, and given all that he has. Look again to the family at Bethany, the silent contemplative affection of Mary—the active and willing service of Martha—the manifest attachment which Jesus and his disciples entertain towards that household—and judge whether it be dishonourable or a mark of hypocrisy that the Church should avail itself of the devoted piety of women? Who was it that, in the poignancy of their grief, bewailed and lamented the humiliation, and disgrace, and suffering of the Son of Man as he

ascended the hill of Calvary to encounter the cursed death? They were the daughters of Jerusalem, who, even in that trying hour, claimed and received the kind notice of Jesus. Who were the foremost at the sepulchre to see the place where the Lord lay? Who were honoured with the angelic vision and the heavenly message to the disciples? The angel said unto the women, "Fear not ye, for I know that ye seek Jesus who was crucified: He is not here; for he is risen as he said; come, see the place where the Lord lay." Again, we find the women mentioned among the disciples as waiting for the fulfilment of the promise of the Holy Spirit. Dorcas, who was full of good works and alms deeds which she did, is honourably known in all the Churches. It was Lydia whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. The women formed Paul's first audience in Macedonia, and among them were the first converts to the truth. "We were in the city of Philippi abiding certain days, and on the Sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made, and we sat down and spake unto the women who resorted thither." The women gave welcome entertainment to the apostles wherever they went on their heavenly embassy, and sheltered them from the storms of persecution, and the rage of ungodly men; ministered to them with their hands and of their substance, and, when they were persecuted out of one city, aided them in their flight to another. Thus, in the salutations to the members of the Church at Rome, who had most honourably signalized themselves in the service of the Church and the cause of Christ, the foremost name is that of Phebe, who, in this noble competition, had earned the highest prize. "I commend unto you," says Paul, "Phebe, our sister, who is a servant of the Church which is at Cenchrea, that ye receive her in the Lord as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you, for she hath been a succourer of many and of myself also." Nor is she the only woman singled out by the apostle as possessing a claim upon the favourable attention of the Church, and upon his personal gratitude. He tells them to "salute Mary also, who bestowed much labour on us." It is surely needless to adduce farther examples. These will suffice to shew that it is by no means an evidence of a false and hypocritical religion that it gains the favour and secures the active services of women. Women watched beside the cradle of Christianity, and nourished and defended it in the struggles of its healthful infancy. Women were the warmest friends of Jesus himself, and of the most pure and zealous ministers that were ever honoured to speak in his name; and we may expect that wherever Christianity presents its pure and undefiled front, and exhibits to the world the lovely graces wherewith the bride of Jesus is adorned,

it will attract the notice, and gain the favour, of devout and honourable women not a few."

Is it, on the other hand, an unfailling mark of a hypocrite to make long prayers? Doubtless there have been many, in every age, who have assumed the form of godliness while denying its power, who have drawn near to God with the mouth, and honoured him with the lips, while their hearts have been far from him. But if hypocritical pretenders affect this devotion, is it not an evidence that prayer is the proper and true life of the believer? Why should the Pharisee pretend to it, if the religious propriety of the thing itself were not felt and acknowledged? The hypocrite does not affect that which does not essentially belong to godliness. It is because prayer is the Christian's vital breath that the Pharisee pretends to pray. Nor is it the Pharisee alone who makes long and frequent prayer. We read of Jesus that he continued all night in prayer; and "he spake a parable to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint." After his ascension to heaven, the disciples assembled in an upper-room at Jerusalem, where they "all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication," awaiting the promised Spirit. The apostolic exhortations are: "Be instant in prayer. Pray without ceasing." No duty is more strongly enforced in the Scriptures than that of prayer, and in the exercise of none is there such abundant hope of reward. The duty is commended to our observance by the most absolute and unlimited promises. "Ask and ye shall receive. Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name I will give it unto you. Prove me now herewith, and see if I will not open the windows of heaven and pour down a blessing upon you till there shall not be room to receive it." Prayer is the medium of communication between the soul and God. God speaks to us in his word; we speak to him in prayer. And that heart in which has been shed abroad the love of God by the Holy Ghost cannot but pray. "Whom have I in heaven but thee, or on the earth whom I desire besides thee?" is the language of such a soul, and it must seek and find communion with the object of its highest affections. Such a soul has also learned the lesson of its own weakness: "My flesh and heart faileth;" it has also learned the secret and the source of its strength: "Thou art the strength of my heart and my portion for ever." Therefore, to pray long—to pray fervently—to pray frequently—is the characteristic of a true saint. The prayerless are dead.

Jesus did not accuse the Pharisees, and pronounce a woe upon them, because they received the support of women, even of widows, nor because of the frequency or length of their prayers. They are blamed, it is true, elsewhere, because in their prayers they used vain repetitions,

as if God would hear them for their much speaking. In this they were imitators of the priests of Baal, who, from morning till noon, stood crying, "O Baal, hear us." Such conduct is sinful and unbecoming in the Christian, assuming, as it does, that God is not always present, the hearer and answerer of prayer. The Pharisees are blamed, also, for praying in the corners of the streets that they might be seen of men, and get credit for a devotion which they did not feel. The Christian prays because he has something to ask, and irrespective of what men may think or say.

What, then, especially, is the sin charged against the Pharisees in the text? The charge, as stated, is dressed out in circumstances peculiar to them. It is accompanied with singular aggravations. They devoured widows' houses, and for a pretence made long prayers; or, as the text with greater propriety might be rendered, Ye devour widows' houses, even under pretence of making long prayers. The prayer was the pretext; the substance of the widows' was the aim. Abstracted, however, from the peculiar circumstances and aggravations with which the sin was accompanied in the actual practice of the Pharisees, the thing condemned in the text is, prayer which is uttered only in pretence, and prayer which has a selfish and worldly end in view. Widows were the objects against whom the Pharisees put in practice their artful hypocrisy. But it is obvious that whosoever may be the objects of the deception, the essential character of the sin remains the same. Nor is the nature of the sin affected by the extent of the pretended devotion. The pretence is the thing blame worthy. It is true the sin becomes more heinous in proportion to the height of the profession, and the Pharisees are worthy of greater damnation, because they not only pretended to devotion, but to very high flights of it. Leaving out of view, however, such aggravating circumstances as these, that their prayer was long, and that the widows and the fatherless were their prey, we have the essential character of the sin set before us, as, at least, worthy of damnation, namely, making a profession of religion for the purpose of advancing worldly interests, and securing the ends of earthly ambition.

Having thus ascertained the real and naked character of the sin, we shall be able more surely to detect and expose it under whatever outward circumstances it may be manifested. The Pharisaic crime essentially is, making a gain of godliness—performing acts that are outwardly religious with the view of increasing our wealth, or obtaining a livelihood, or securing any worldly and selfish end whatsoever. The Pharisees of our day, then, who lie under the woe pronounced by Jesus, are

1. Those ministers who enter upon and continue in their office for a

piece of bread. The most pitiable being among all the afflicted sons of humanity, is he who has assumed the holy office of the ministry for the sake of worldly ends and objects. Without any sense of the dignity of his calling, with no relish for its sacred offices—passing through the round of his avocations as a piece of hateful drudgery to which he is chained down by necessity—destitute of the love of souls, and yet obliged to speak to men of what concerns their immortal interests—dead to the love of God, and yet obliged to contemplate the most glorious manifestations of his character,—the misery of such a man lies in the way of his proper work, his snatches of happiness are gleaned from other fields. His whole life is a lie. He directs men into a blind path which he will not tread himself. The blood of unwarned souls cries against him for vengeance. He despises himself in the doing of that very work which he undertook in the name of the glory of God. Such an one is the lineal representative of the ancient Pharisee. He prays, but it is for a pretence; he preaches, but it is that he may obtain a living. Separate the benefice from the cure, and his labour would cease. What wickedness can be more atrocious than this—more hateful in the eyes of God—more despicable in the view of honourable men? What wickedness can be more destructive to souls? It makes religion to stink in the nostrils of men of integrity and common sense. It converts the services of the sanctuary into a delusion and a mockery. It makes God, and heaven, and hell a pretence for imposing upon the minds of the credulous. It is the nurse and foster-parent of infidelity. It is at best but the promoter of a dead formalism. If the minister be content for time and eternity to make a form—a mere outward show—a bodily service of all that is sacred—why may not the people be saved too by church attendance and participation in sacraments? How unspeakable the misery and the guilt of unconverted ministers! and yet how frequent and notorious the sin! It is impossible in the judgment of the gentlest charity to believe it otherwise. Pharisaism has not ceased from among the professed teachers of the truth of God. And if our age has witnessed how competent the power of faith is to overcome the world, it has witnessed also the converse lesson, how competent the power of worldliness is to assume the form and functions of a living Christianity.

2. But the Pharisaic crime is by no means limited to ministers. Those people are guilty of it, in whatever position they are placed, who, for the sake of good repute, from fear of worldly loss, or from the desire of worldly gain—or who, actuated by any earthly or selfish motive whatever, make profession of a religion which they do not believe. Such men may not for a pretence make long prayers, the probability is they do

not pray at all. But they have a religious profession—they attend a church—they are members of it—they profess discipleship at the Lord's table. The covering of their hypocrisy may be very thin. The greater number assume their religion only within the walls of the church, and leave it behind them when they retire, that it may await their convenience on another Sabbath day. But whatever of religion they profess, be it great or little, it is only a pretext. It is with them no more than a cloak to shelter them from the reproach of infidelity, to give them a decent appearance before men, or to advance some worldly end; or if it be any thing more than this, religion is to them at the very most less than the world—nay, less than the least convenience or smallest possession in the world; the body is more precious than the soul—the interests of time than those of eternity—the favour of man than the favour of God. And thus they prove that they do not know what the soul is, nor what God is, nor what eternity is. Religion, if it be realized at all, is better than all silver and gold; faith, if it lay hold of Christ at all, counts all things but loss for the excellence of the knowledge of him. Such men, then, have no religion. Their profession is a hypocritical pretext; and it is a pretext assumed from a worldly motive. The character and crime of the Pharisees belongs to them. Are such characters rare? On the contrary, who can count the number of them? Oh! heedless, blinded, hardened sinners, do you fear the frown of an angry man, and are you not afraid of the eternal wrath of an angry God? Are you so afraid that you should lose hold of your little worldly possessions, suffer loss and inconvenience, it may be nakedness, and hunger, and cold, and are you not afraid, when your bodies are laid naked in the earth, of the time when the unclothed soul shall appear before the judge of all, be banished for ever from the heavenly inheritance, and consigned to remediless perdition. "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his father, with the holy angels." Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! ye shall receive the greater damnation. Ye are self-condemned; for if religion be nothing more than a name, why do ye make profession of it? Why have ye ministers, and churches, and sacraments, in honour of a shadow? If it be a reality, it is worth more than all the world—worth more than houses, and lands, and friends, and health, and liberty, and food, and raiment. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me."

We have yet to examine a third charge which Jesus brings against the scribes and Pharisees. He accompanies the recital of it with a denunciation of the same woe he had already twice invoked upon them. "Woe



unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte ; and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves."

The apostles of deceit and falsehood have often manifested a zeal in the propagation of their principles which is fitted to minister a severe reproof to those who know and who believe the truth. This does not arise from the circumstance that the apostles of error are possessed of more energy and activity of mind than the friends of truth, but because they have frequently a more hearty interest in the advancement of their cause. They have been awake and active while Christians have been slothful and slumbering. And, lest it should be said that such a contrast results from a natural buoyancy and vigour which believers generally do not shew, we have frequent opportunities of contrasting the Christian with himself—of comparing the manner in which he acts when he is really alive to the attainment of his object, and when he is comparatively indifferent about it.

Let there be an opening for worldly advancement, and the gratification of worldly ambition, and the way is crowded with rival and eager candidates. There is no remissness of effort among them. Every source of influence is applied to—every opportunity eagerly embraced—the calculations of success frequently made—every error carefully detected and remedied. Who are these that with eager countenances crowd the way to the places of emolument, and honour, and security, and ease ? You will recognise among them many Christian men—not pretenders only, but real believers. Every faculty of their minds is aroused and active, and they bid fair to outstrip all competitors in the race, and to win the prize.

Let there be an opening for Christian usefulness—a position in which a man might act the part of an apostle—which would afford him abundant opportunities of manifesting the power of his faith and the strength of his Christian affection—a place for making proof of his self-denial, and for not only proclaiming the riches of the grace of Christ, but of exhibiting its reality and power,—the pathway to such a position is deserted, there are no rival competitors here. Perishing souls are crying for life and health, but there are few bold enough to carry to them the only balm which can heal them. Is it not to the shame and guilt of the Christian world that so many fields should be white unto the harvest, and so few reapers to go forth and gather in the precious fruits.

The conquests of early Christianity were rapid and wide, because its apostles had strong faith and untiring zeal. The Pharisees compassed sea and land to make one proselyte ; the Apostles sought them out in every land, and God gave them multitudes of souls for their hire. How

rarely has such a spirit of faith and zeal and such signal success been manifested in the history of the Christian Church. It reappeared for a season at the era of the reformation : we are now awaiting its third revival. The Pharisaic zeal has been much more active—witness the rise, the progress, the wide conquests of Mahomet ; witness, above all, the Romish apostacy. With untiring energy it has sought its victims and slain them ; and never at any former period were its agents more active and its successes more signal than at present. With a wisdom and concentration which has no parallel in any other body, it is everywhere pushing its conquests. It finds no want of missionaries—it enters every open door. Among the great islands of the Pacific—amid the forests of the new world—among the countless population of China—in the face of barbarism, and amid the refinements of civilized and learned life, it is rapidly forcing its way. We might well despair and crouch under its giant sway, had it not been proved that there is a power stronger than it. Christ is mightier than Satan. He proved it on the field of the world eighteen hundred years ago. He proved it a second time before the nations of Europe in the glorious conquest of the reformation. He will make it manifest again. O that the living Church would call him to the proof that he might be glorified.

From what has been stated, it will be manifest that it is not the fact of making proselytes or converts against which the woe of Christ is denounced. This, on the contrary, is the great duty which he has laid upon all his disciples ; and the illustrious reward he hath promised to the work is, that they who turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever. A church is doing nothing if it be not making proselytes. It is a dead trunk ready for the fire. There was sin, however, in the Pharisees making converts ; and there was sin in the manner in which they did it ; and sin in the motives by which their zeal was animated. Themselves the dupes of falsehood, every act by which they propagated their views was sinful. It is not enough that a man believes himself to be in the right to make him innocent in endeavouring to gain over others to his views and principles. His own error, it is true, is the root of the evil, but for cherishing that he is a sinner. If his error become fruitful, he but aggravates his offence, and makes his guilt the greater. Every new convert he gains sets another seal upon his condemnation. Saul, the Pharisee, did not consider himself innocent in holding by the superstitions of the sect to which he belonged ; nor did he regard himself as guiltless that he had been actively and zealously engaged in promoting them, and verily thinking that he ought to do many things against the disciples of Jesus. Nor were the Pharisees guiltless in the motives by which they were actuated. They were driven

on by hatred of the truth—by love of influence and power. They did not care to make their converts holier and better and happier men. They made them twofold more the children of hell than themselves. It was enough that they assumed the name and made the outward profession.

It will be instructive to examine for a little the methods they adopted for preserving their influence, extending their power, and crushing the truth. We will thus be able to understand more perfectly the grounds of the condemnation pronounced against them, and how their zeal should have produced such fruits.

1. In the ninth chapter of the gospel according to John we find the record of a miraculous work of Jesus, in opening the eyes of a man who had been blind from his birth. The Pharisees became aware that such a miracle had been wrought, and with great propriety made immediate and diligent inquiry into the reality of the fact. They received the best possible evidence of the miracle. The blind man was then in possession of his sight; and it was known and attested that he was the same man whom they had known in his blindness. Here, then, there was danger to their influence. They must counteract the force of this miracle, else their power would be shaken. They must persuade the people, and the subject of the miracle himself, that this is no work of God for which they ought to be thankful and give him the glory. They discover that the miracle was wrought on a Sabbath day, and they seize upon this fact as sufficient of itself to destroy all respect and gratitude towards Jesus. They say, "this man is not of God, because he keepeth not the Sabbath day. Give God the praise, we know that this man is a sinner." It was true that Jesus had done this work on the Sabbath, but it was not true that he had thereby transgressed the commandment of God. The law of the Sabbath did not forbid the performance of works of necessity and mercy. Jesus was falsely accused so far as the Divine will was concerned. But the Pharisees had improved upon the law of God, and in their view this work of Jesus was sinful. He had acted against the law which they had framed and established, and which was recognised in the obedience and submission of the Jews. The means, then, by which they sought to quench the truth—to induce a denial of the manifest power of God, and to retain the people as their proselytes and followers—were to bring against Jesus the accusation of *breaking the law of the land*. He who did so, they argued, must be a sinner—he could not come from God, and to follow him would be certain destruction.

Suppose they had succeeded, in this instance, and made a proselyte to their views of the man whose eyes had been opened—suppose he had

been overawed by the fear of their indignation, and threats of expulsion from the synagogue, and consented either to deny the miracle altogether, or to confess that Jesus was a sinner—what would have been the result? He would certainly have become twofold more the child of hell than the Pharisees. He could only become a proselyte of theirs by a process which must have ruined his whole moral and rational nature. In order to this he must have denied what he knew to be a manifest work of God—trampled upon his vivid and present convictions of duty—outraged his sense of justice and his feelings of gratitude—seared his conscience, and denied the simplest conclusions of his reason. A proselyte so gained must have become worse than those who sought his adherence to their cause—a man whom no reason could hereafter convince, and no moral feeling could influence. Such are all disciples gained by such a course of action. They are worse than useless to the party who obtains them, and their adherence involves them in a double ruin—a second death.

2. Throughout the narratives of the evangelists, there are scattered abundant evidences of another instrument of proselytising employed by the Pharisees. It is the language of *reviling and scorn*. They ridiculed the poverty of the disciples. The religion of Jesus they represented as implying something mean and contemptible. “Have any of the rulers believed in him?” The place of Christ’s birth was a subject of mockery: “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” His disciples were scorned as Galileans. The apostles speaking in the power of the Holy Ghost, were men drunken with new wine. Nothing could surpass the indignant scorn with which they answered the question of the man who had been born blind when he asked them: “Will ye also be his disciples?” Then they reviled him and said, “Thou art his disciple, but we are Moses’ disciples. We know that God spake unto Moses; as for this fellow, we know not from whence he is.” Thus it would appear that they looked upon their religion as respectable at least for its antiquity. This religion of Jesus was little more than three years old, a thing new and unworthy of credit. The Pharisees were mistaken here, as well as in many other things. The religion of Jesus had the advantage of theirs not only in its truth, but in its antiquity. Moses was not the founder of Pharisaiism, it was the corrupt offspring of a degenerate and recent age.

Doubtless by such reviling and mockery they might attain a certain measure of success. Many might thus be ashamed to acknowledge Jesus, and many more would willingly join them in their insulting language. So far, however, as such weapons were successful, nothing but evil could be the result. A proselyte so gained, became merely a

disciple to evil speaking. The power which has gained him to the Pharisees, is the power of raillery, and he has submitted to this by the sacrifice of calm conviction, and sober investigation. He either becomes in his turn an expert railer, or he is afraid to look henceforth in the naked face of truth. Without any settled convictions, he is at the mercy of every wind of doctrine, and becomes twofold more the child of hell than he was.

3. Another instrument of the Pharisees for making and retaining proselytes, was *misrepresentation and calumny*. They watched the words of Jesus that they might have something to report to his disadvantage. They observed his actions that they might find matter of accusation against him. They put to him insnaring questions that they might charge him with blasphemy, or treason. They did not scruple to hire and suborn witnesses to stand in evidence against him, in the mock trial to which he was subjected. By every invention which a malignant ingenuity could suggest, they sought to compass his destruction. They felt that either Jesus or they must submit. The disciple of Jesus could not be a Pharisee, but they judged that the spirit of falsehood and calumny was strong enough to destroy Jesus. Jesus at one period, however, had the people on his side, and they were afraid to destroy him by violence. But they could corrupt the minds of the people, and then safely put their designs in execution. Blasphemy and treason were good watchwords in such a warfare. They had the wisdom to adopt them, and they succeeded in their immediate object. Jesus was crucified under this double charge.

Now it is altogether a devil's work to make a man a disciple to lying. Falsehood, under any circumstances, is dangerous, and ultimately destructive to the whole moral nature. But that a falsehood should form the turning point of man's history—that it should constitute the thing which determines his course of action—is doubly destructive. This was the case with such disciples of the Pharisees, and hence they became twofold more the children of hell than themselves—the adopted and chosen sons of him who is the accuser of the brethren.

4. The Pharisees made converts by *force*. They took up the weapons of persecution and vigorously employed them. Their well known practice had passed into a heathen proverb:—

“ We'll force you, like the proselyting Jews,  
To be like us.”

At an early period in the gospel history, we find that they punished the confession of the name of Jesus, by expulsion from the synagogue. Their violence increased with the progress of Christianity, and they perse-

cuted on a larger scale and with greater severity. They stoned Stephen to death. "And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the Church, which was at Jerusalem, and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the Church, entering into every house, and halting men and women, committed them to prison."

And still farther, we find that "Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem." Such was the Pharisaic method of making proselytes, and of checking the growth and progress of the truth.

A man so converted—in terror of bonds, imprisonment, death—under the influence of lesser fears than these—the fear of worldly loss—the displeasure of relatives and friends—the fear of offending men high in station and influence—becomes worse than those who sway him. He is the victim of force, with a conscience, it may be, overborne and silenced. He is removed from the proper position of a rational and accountable being. He has been subjected to the law of beasts, and in yielding to that law, has become brutal. He has sacrificed the right to exercise his judgment and obey the law of his conscience, and has now no other guide than the sense of fear. That law, moreover, to which he submits is the law he will apply, and the only one he knows how to use. The power he may possess will be brutally abused, and he will prove himself twofold the child of hell.

When such facts and principles as these are carefully attended to, it will, we think, be apparent, that when Jesus brings the charge contained in the text against the Pharisees, there is something more implied in it than is explicitly stated in words. The charge as expressed, pronounces woe against them, because of their great zeal in making proselytes, and because of the lamentable results which followed upon their conversion. Their zeal, indeed, is magnified by a very emphatic form of expression. They are represented as compassing sea and land in the propagation of their principles, that is, they sought converts wheresoever they were to be found—were impeded by no difficulties, availed themselves of all opportunities, and were regardless of distance and of danger in the work. But, besides, they are represented as doing all this in order to make *one* proselyte; from which it appears that their zeal was so intense that they did not await favourable opportunities, and the

prospects of great success, but that their energies were called into action by the prospect of gaining even *one* convert. When, however, we look to the results of their labour, we perceive that there is something more implied than is expressed. Their converts are represented as being made doubly worse than themselves. Now, such a result could not have followed, had their *means* of conversion been those of persuasion and argument alone. In such a case their converts would have been as bad as themselves, but no worse. When these results, however, are contemplated in the light which the Scripture history of the Pharisees affords, we perceive not only how they should have inevitably followed from the methods they employed in gaining converts, but that there is also in the text an implied charge against them because of the adoption of such means. The precise crime, then, which is laid against the Pharisees is, that in their zeal for making converts, they forgot what was due to the claims of conscience and reason, and had recourse to means which inevitably issued in the ruin of those whom they gained to their cause.

This crime, in its whole extent, and almost in its whole circumstances, is still chargeable against many. It characterizes the whole history of Popery, and has been painfully and extensively developed at this day, before our own eyes, by a Church professedly Protestant. It is a crime which we might expect to be perpetrated in the name of a religion of outward forms, such as that of the Pharisees was. That religion which has its foundations in eternal truth, disdains to employ such weapons, and has no temptation to use them. For the work of such a religion is upon the soul of man, and it has gained nothing, till it has gained the conscience, and reason, and heart. Its converts are not counted by the position they occupy, and the profession they make, but by their thoughts being brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. The constraint which it employs is not upon the outward man, but its aim is, to bring the soul under the constraining love of Christ. It addresses itself to the conscience and reason, and grateful feelings of men. It waits for the effective operation of the Spirit of God. Its results are to quicken the dead—to make the dry bones live—to give a healthful direction, and fresh vitality and power to all the faculties. Formalism, on the other hand, addresses itself to the worldly fears and ambitious hopes of men. It has nothing besides to which it can make its appeal. It has no arguments to reason and conscience, and its object is not to save the soul, but to induce an outward conformity. It is strong only in numbers, and in worldly influence, and it forces its way by giving prevalence and power only to the baser passions of humanity.

A twofold evil is attendant upon such operations. When the voice of conscience is silent and overborne, and when the spirit of inquiry i

crushed, the way is open for a heartless and unmitigated despotism. Passive obedience takes the place of intelligent submission—the spirit of enterprise is destroyed—the traces of civilization are effaced—and national weakness, ignorance, and barbarism follow. But more mournful even than these, are the direct and immediate consequences which follow upon such means of proselytism. The converts are not merely made barren formalists, but they become twofold worse. In the very act of their conversion, an ascendancy has been given to those passions of their nature, which make them twofold more the children of hell.

Yet even to such we would hold out the language of invitation and of hope. The grace of our God can accomplish impossible things. Saul the persecutor became Paul the Apostle. And the purpose for which this great work was effected in him was, “that in him first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long suffering, for a pattern to them who should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.” Your salvation is possible—your position is in the last degree dangerous. To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. Seek Him while he may be found, call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return unto the Lord, who is merciful, and to our God who will abundantly pardon. The lost will then be saved—the children of hell will become children of God. Even from the gates of destruction Jesus invites you to return, and follows you with his compassionate tears to the borders of the lake that burneth.



## LECTURE XX.

BY THE REV. JOHN EDMONDSTON, ASHKIRK.

“Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.”  
—1 PETER i. 3-5.

THE inspired author of this epistle having invoked the blessing of God on those believers to whom it is addressed, gives thanks to God for what he had done for them; and in these remarkable words he condenses the most important, instructive, and precious views of Divine grace, and of the unspeakable value of its blessings to all who are interested in them by faith.

There is no one of the Apostolical epistles that has a more direct practical tendency than this, to prepare the people of Christ for the exercise of self-denial and patience under trials; and, while the whole tone of the epistle is most admirable in this respect, the words of the text may be considered as opening up at once, to Christians, the very well-spring of living waters, from which they may draw unfailing consolation in every time when their faith is put to the proof.

The relation in which Christians stand to God, and in which he has placed himself to them, is one which furnishes an eternal theme of praise and thanksgiving; and they who can understand and appreciate the mercy of God as thus set forth, shall never want songs of joy, even in the darkest night of affliction; while they have, in these views, a basis of stable support from which no trial, to which their faith can be subjected, can ever be severe enough to move them.

The apostle Paul says of the Christian's hope, that “it maketh not ashamed.” It is a hope which no sinner believing in Jesus need be ashamed to profess; and it will not put to shame, by disappointing, any of those who are brought to lay hold on it in God's way.

In the following remarks on the text, let us advert, 1st, To the origin of the Christian's hope; 2d, To its object; 3d, To the grounds on which it rests, and, as connected with these, the security that it shall be infallibly realized.

I. What is the origin of the Christian's hope? Is it his own doing? his own work? did the idea of it occur to himself? or did he, or could he, pay any price for the possession of this most blessed hope? Why, the very term "*hope*," according to its native meaning, implies that we are drawn out from ourselves; and while we may trust ourselves in any case in which we may reasonably think our power or skill adequate to the occasion, when, on the contrary, we discover our own resources to be vain, we then look about us for some *opening* from without, through which we may think it barely possible that help may be descried. This exercise of the mind, in looking to something out of ourselves for that help which is not in us, is properly the exercise of "*hope*,"—looking to something distant, either in time or place, for a happier state of things than that in which we may find ourselves situated.

Now, hope may be stronger or weaker according to the state of our minds; it may vary also according to circumstances. At one time it may brighten up into confidence, at another it may vanish away to despair. The strongest, wildest hopes may be cherished on weak grounds by a sanguine or presumptuous mind; while a mind of a different temperament will require the most favourable appearances to raise it above despondency.

There is no resource to which the miserable cling so tenaciously for support as to hope; and often hope may be the only principle that can preserve from breaking down under a load of trials; and, *for a time*, the beneficial effect of hope may be almost equally great whether it be in reality well or ill founded. Of course a false or presumptuous hope must of necessity be at length put to shame; but so long as its hollowness is not known or suspected, it may for a time have its characteristic effect, as well as if it had rested on a true foundation.

Now *the hope* of which the Apostle speaks, in the passage under consideration, has characters which distinguish it from all other hopes. It is of all the brightest and the best: it is *Divine* in its origin, *immovable* in its grounds, and *infallible* in its promises.

This hope has its *origin* from the abundant mercy of God, even the father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Mercy is the only quarter to which perishing sinners could look for any blessing; and it is to God's free, unbought mercy, that believers are indebted for all their hopes. Divine justice had been heinously offended by sin—divine holiness utterly abhors it; and the sentence which proclaims the doom of sinners runs in these awful words—"Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law, to do them." If God had not been possessed of the attribute of mercy, vain had it been for sinners to hope for any escape from justice; and it is only because ho

is long-suffering, and gracious, and slow to anger, and of great mercy, that we, the sinful sons of Adam, are not consumed.

And when we look to the number, the heinousness, and the aggravations of our sins, it is plain that, in pardoning us, there is scope not only for mercy, but for much mercy; nor can we fail to see how the grace and mercy of God are made to abound in removing from us our iniquities, as far as east is from the west, and in forbearing to deal with us as we have sinned.

It is to the mercy of God, then—to his abundant mercy, that we are indebted for any hope which we are permitted to cherish. But it is proper to observe, that it is not to simple, blind, indiscriminating mercy, that we are indebted, for God has other attributes that must have scope for display, as well as mercy; and it has been well said, “a God all mercy, is a God unjust.”

How is it, then, that sinners of mankind can hope in the mercy of God? It must be in his mercy declared through his Son. No sinner dare take refuge blindly in even the mercy of God; no sinner could presume to cast himself on mercy without encouragement to do so; but the greatest sinner is encouraged to flee to God's mercy, as he is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ—to mercy made known to us *through a Redeemer*—through one whom God himself has set forth as Mediator, as Saviour, as the propitiation for our sins.

In the words used by the Apostle in the passage now before us, there is a concurrence of expressions which tend to destroy every idea of *power in ourselves* in the matter of salvation, and every idea of merit in anything about us. It is “*according to God's abundant mercy*” that believers have this hope; it is because of his mercy *through Christ the Saviour*; and, further, it is because *he hath begotten* us to it.

Such language is very peculiar—it is very forcible—it is not easy to be mistaken, or, when once understood, to be forgotten.

What are the hopes which, by nature, we are entitled to cherish? Paul, in Ephes. ii. 3, speaks of believers being, “by nature, children of wrath,” and as such, of course, and continuing such, they had no reason to look for anything from a holy God, except “infinite wrath and infinite despair.” *This* is the inheritance to which they are entitled by nature's birthright. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved them, hath begotten them again to a lively hope—to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away. As, then, the possibility of having this hope rests on the Divine mercy, so the actual possession of it is due to the almighty power of God, carrying into effect the purposes of his mercy, and thus, they who are begotten again of God to a lively hope, can claim no

merit to themselves in the matter ; “ of *his own will* begat he us,” says James.

It is God, then, who, according to his *abundant* mercy through Christ, is the author of his people’s hope. He *begetteth* them anew to this hope—it is *his* doing, not their own ; and while to his mercy is due the praise of originating this gracious purpose, to his power is due the praise of carrying it into happy effect, and begetting them again to this lively hope.

And observe the force of the beautiful and expressive language of the inspired Apostle. It is not simply *hope* to which the people of God are begotten—it is not simply *good hope*, but *lively, living* hope. These terms correspond well with the first part of the figure, which represents God as begetting his people again. The hope which is theirs is a thing of life, and, instead of remaining stationary, or falling away, it will live and grow ; and while the hope of the hypocrite is as the giving up of the ghost, the hope of God’s children is like the shining light of the morning ; it is that which cannot be repressed ; even though it may be partially obscured behind clouds, still it grows, shining more and more unto the perfect day. It is instinct with life, and its life will no more be destroyed than his from whom it was derived. It is a hope which will stand the severest tests by which it may be tried ; and let the people of God, in whom it dwells, be persecuted even unto death ; let their sufferings and trials be extreme, even seemingly surpassing the limits of possible endurance, still their hope will be, in the language of the text, a “ *living hope*”—a hope that maketh not ashamed. It is living, and sure, and steadfast, because of its origin and its proper seat ; it is of God’s begetting, and it taketh hold of that which is within the veil, and, therefore, come what will come, he who hath this hope in him can never be moved from his steadfastness.

II. This leads us to speak, in the second place, of the object of this hope. It is from the mercy of God, as Peter plainly informs us, that it derives its origin. It is Divine mercy that awakens it into being ; and what is it, we next inquire, to which its regards are directed ? Now, the blessings of Divine grace to which believers are privileged to direct their hopes, are set forth generally, in the passage before us, by two different terms ; first, as an “ *inheritance*,” incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading ; and, secondly, as a “ *salvation*.” Both of the views thus presented to us claim shortly our notice in expounding this passage.

1. The blessings to which the hopes of believers are directed are represented as an inheritance. The object of the Christian’s hope is no

vain, or small, or trifling object. It is not any of the vanities of time—it is not any of the joys of sense—it is not the best, or greatest, or noblest that this earth can afford; but it is a blessing from on high—an inheritance of blessings, before which all that is great, or noble, or costly, or coveted in this world, fades away into insignificance. It is even an inheritance of glory—an inheritance with the saints in light—an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading. The description which the Apostle gives of this inheritance, like all other descriptions in which heavenly things are set forth in human language, is only one of comparison. For no human terms can ever adequately describe those things which God hath laid up for them that fear him—those things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart to conceive them. No human language can ever give us an absolutely perfect idea of things so far removed from our present experience—so far exalted above our present condition; and the Apostle says little more here of the believer's inheritance than is barely sufficient to indicate that it is entirely free from the defects and blemishes which cleave to all earthly things.

The inheritance to which the Christian is called to raise his hopes is incorruptible: it is not only that which cannot be destroyed or impaired, but that which has no seeds or spring of corruption within itself. But this is not all. It is a great thing, no doubt, to know of a treasure in heaven, which neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and which thieves cannot steal; but the Apostle uses words which speak of still higher excellence. The inheritance is *undefiled*: it cannot be defiled by sin, as all the good things of this world are, more or less, by the manner in which they have been acquired, or by the use that is made of them; therefore, the Apostle adds the blessed and consolatory assurance that the inheritance is undefiled—it can receive no stain, it is necessarily and eternally pure, so that sin can find no place in it.

And the third term employed in describing this inheritance, raises the idea of the Apostle to the highest power. The inheritance is not only incorrupted, not only undefiled, but, so far from being corruptible, so entirely secure is it against every blemish, that it never suffers the slightest and most superficial change; its *very bloom* (for that is the idea conveyed) will continue in all its freshness, without any change.

Thus, then, the figurative language of the text sets forth the inheritance of the saints as free from every imperfection and from every change; and, without dwelling further on this sufficiently clear and impressive description, let us now just look to the force of the word *inheritance*.

That blessedness which is the object of the Christian's hope, is not a

purchase of his own—it is not any reward of his merit—it is not any compensation for services—it is not wages, but a free gift; and not only a gift, but a gift so made over to each believer, so secured to him as to be well styled an inheritance. He receives his title to it as the son of God: and as the title of the lawful heir to any earthly estate cannot be set aside without an act of injustice, without illegally depriving him of that which is his due—so neither can any thing set aside the title of the child of God to that inheritance which he is privileged to look forward to, in virtue of his being the child of God, *begotten again to this lively hope.*

Moreover, it is called an inheritance, because as yet it is only in prospect. It is the believer's in all its plenitude—it is certainly, indefeasibly, and eternally his, but, *as yet*, he does not entirely possess it—he enjoys it, as yet, only in hope. But as certainly as God is now, by his word, and spirit, and providences, *making his children meet* for the inheritance of the saints in light, so certainly the hope which animates them is a living hope, and will not make them ashamed. It will live, and grow, and brighten, and support them, till faith shall be turned to sight, and hope be swallowed up in enjoyment.

2. The object of the Christian's hope is also denoted in the text by the term “salvation.” This term denotes redemption from slavery; deliverance from evil or distress of various kinds; victory over enemies, and rescue from their power; and while used repeatedly in all these meanings in sacred writ, when applied to the people of Christ, whom he died to save, it denotes, in its full and final import, their being brought at length, through every difficulty and danger, triumphantly to the safe, secure, imperishable, enjoyment of his eternal kingdom.

The *inheritance* comprehends all the blessings which they can desire or enjoy; all that is finally for their good; all that Christ has purchased for them; this is what chiefly they have to thank God for; this is that in the perfect enjoyment of which they shall be made eternally blessed. And as the *lively hope* expresses their state of mind with regard to it while *here*, so their *salvation* signifies their being at last *secured* in the enjoyment of it, without the slightest possibility of anything to deprive them of it, or to interrupt or mar their enjoyment.

The term *salvation*, then, as here used, is not a mere variety of expression, repeating only in varied language the idea that had already been expressed, by “*inheritance.*” There is evidently a rising meaning in the apostle's words. There is, first, “*a hope,*” which is the present feeling and disposition of the renewed spirit looking forward to good things to come; then there is “*the inheritance*” itself, which is the great and glorious, the eternal, and real, and abiding object of this hope; and

lastly, there is the "*hope*" giving place to the "*actual possession*" of this inheritance; the attainment of the last and highest end for which the believer was begotten again to this hope; his *personal* deliverance from all evils, and his introduction to the heavenly inheritance; the perfect fulfilment of the hope, the inalienable possession, and the eternal fruition of the inheritance.

And this salvation is not only already perfect in itself, and certain and infallible to all who have an interest in Christ, but is even now ready to be manifested in the last time. There is, for the present, a veil between the Christian and his final salvation; but this is only a temporary state of things, and does not, in the very least degree, affect the certainty of his future bliss. For salvation is in all respects, and with all its blessings, prepared for the child of God, and ready to be bestowed; God's fulness of time has only to be waited for; and when once, in the course of his providence, and by the mighty working of his grace, his child is fully *made meet* for the glorious *inheritance*, then (not before) the veil shall drop from his eyes, and he shall see and know even as he is known.

III. We now proceed to speak shortly of the grounds on which this hope rests, and the security which assures the believer that this hope shall not fail to be realized.

We have seen that, in its origin, the believer's hope is to be ascribed to God; to his mercy and to his power; the believer is begotten of God to a lively hope of a blessed eternity. Now, this hope should be considered, not only in its origin, but in its grounds, in its confirmation and its certainty; and, blessed be God, there is very ample cause, from all these views, why all who have this hope should to all eternity bless God who, in his mercy, is the author of it.

Elsewhere (James i. 18) we are told, "Of his own will begat he us by the word of truth." It is the word of God which gives light and life; the gospel is the power of God unto salvation; his promises, which are exceeding great and precious, were given that we might be partakers of a Divine nature.

The word of God, which cannot lie, is, then, the great ground of the Christian's hope; and all God's children and servants can appreciate and can adopt the language of David, when he says, "remember the word unto thy servant on which thou hast caused me to hope," Ps. cxix. 49.

But it is of importance to observe that it is not the naked word of God on which the believer's hope is grounded. This is, no doubt, ample and sufficient to rest his eternal all upon. If God should promise to the most guilty person pardon and peace and bliss, and call him to come and ac-

cept of it, and should make the offer known in any way that should preclude all mistake as to its being in reality *His offer*, and *His call*, no sinner so addressed need hesitate to believe; nor, indeed, could he be excused if he refused to believe and comply.

But, in all God's transactions with sinful men regarding their salvation, we have not only his word, but, in addition, the partial fulfilment of that word; and, while the word declares his purposes, we have these purposes themselves manifested, in their partial and commencing fulfilment; we see steps taken—the most solemn and momentous steps taken towards carrying God's promises and purposes into complete effect; and if ever, for a single moment, we might be tempted to slight or overlook, or disbelieve any word of God (which we cannot do without guilt), we should, on the slightest reflection, be admonished of our error, and recalled to right, and proper, and saving views, if we look to what God has done in fulfilment of his word.

And not only are the promises exceeding great and precious, but they are in Christ all "*yea and amen*;" and, when we look to Christ as God's unspeakable gift, we can see the force of the apostle's unanswerable reasoning, "He that spared not his own son, but freely gave him up to the death for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

The apostle, in the text, refers to the *resurrection* of Christ in connexion with the Christian's hope. Now, it is Christ altogether; a whole Christ, in all his offices, in all his states, in all he did and suffered as Mediator; that is the proper ground of the Christian's hope before God—the great confirmation of his promises and offers of mercy. But the apostle speaks here merely of his resurrection, either as corresponding with the terms he had used in describing the Christian's hope—it was a *living* hope to which he was *begotten* again; or he may use it as describing the completion and success of Christ's work; inasmuch as his resurrection both implied his previous death and shewed that he had not died in vain. He died for our offences, and, having as surety paid the penalty for us, and satisfied Divine justice in our stead, he rose again for our justification.

The resurrection of Christ, then, is that very point in his transactions, as Saviour and surety, which concentrates in itself the very essence of the Christian's hope. It is that point at which his triumph manifestly began; that point at which he was shewn to be a conqueror; at which it was shewn that, even by his death, he had abolished death, and destroyed him that had the power of it. So that well may the apostle Paul ask, Rom. viii. 33, "If God be for us, who can be against us? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God



that justifieth ; who is he that condemneth ? It is Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again," &c.

Looking to the resurrection of Christ, then, as a consequence of his sacrificial and expiatory death, we are assured of the reality of that inheritance which is the object of the Christian's hope ; and we know and are sure that, in its value, it is not unworthy of its price ; and, as we are not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with the blood of Christ, as of a lamb without spot or blemish, so we know that the blessings of Christ's redemption, of this inheritance of glory, are blessings far beyond what gold and silver, all the treasures of the world, or of many worlds, could purchase ; and, though now we see it not, yet knowing that Christ paid the price—that this price has been accepted (as evidenced by his resurrection), so this inheritance is surely reserved in heaven for all who are by faith united to him who died for them and rose again.

It is in the heavens ; kept and laid up where it can neither be destroyed nor plundered. The people of God may be assailed by many trials and temptations ; they may be persecuted, afflicted, and beset with doubts and fears. But their inheritance is beyond the reach of all these ; it is kept in heaven for them. It is kept *for them*, not only in itself secure from every misfortune, but secure, also, from every misappropriation. It cannot be alienated from its rightful possessors ; it is laid up for Christ's people, and none else shall receive it in their stead.

And as from these considerations there is all desirable assurance that the inheritance has been purchased, is secured, and shall, without fail, be kept for those for whom it is destined, so also there is the most perfect assurance that they shall be brought to it. They may have much to encounter ere this can be the case ; it is through much tribulation that they must enter into the kingdom. But still there is no fear of failure in the end, for, as the inheritance is prepared and secured for them in heaven, so they are kept safely for it. If the inheritance is to be secured for the, as yet far distant, heirs, there must also, of necessity, be a keeping of their persons that they may be sure of reaching the possession of it. And, accordingly, they are kept safe from all evil in the *world*, just as their inheritance is kept securely for them in heaven.

In this present life the believer is exposed to many trials ; he is beset by numberless dangers ; he is watched by enemies who seek his life, and wait for his halting ; and, notwithstanding he has the promise of the eternal inheritance, yet were he to be left to take care of himself, he might still have many fears and doubts as to his ultimately reaching it. But this is not the way God works ; he does not leave the believer to himself : he is kept ; he is *guarded* as by a military escort, defended

as by an armed protector. He is kept by the power of God. The same power which created him anew and begat him to a lively hope, also preserves and keeps him safe. As it is in nature, so also in grace. The Creator's power requires to be repeated or continued in that of the preserver. He who begins the good work in the hearts of his children, requires to carry it on to perfection. He who creates the sinner anew, can not forsake the work of his own hands; he who begets to a living hope, needs to keep those so begotten by his mighty power unto salvation. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower, into which the righteous runneth and is safe."—Prov. xviii. 10.

God does not do his work imperfectly, and when he takes one step toward the attainment of an end, however numerous may be those which need to follow, there is no doubt but that they will all be found to take place in due course, for (Rom. viii. 28-30), "we know that all things work together for good to them that love God—to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he did also predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified."

The salvation of sinners is God's work, in design, in execution, and in application, and, in all its parts, it bears traces of his finger, and manifests the glory of his power, as well as the riches of his grace.

Now, it is God's power that keeps the Christian unto salvation; but how? through *faith*. This faith is his gift; and what is this faith? it is, in the language of Scripture, "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." We do not, and cannot as yet see eternal things, but we *now* lay hold of them by faith. Even *now*, even at this distance, we by faith take hold of the inheritance, and enjoy it by anticipation.

And here we see the proper place, use, and value of faith. It is God who begetteth sinners again to a living hope; it is Christ who died to purchase for them a title to all the blessings of salvation. The inheritance on which they are called to fix their hope, is reserved for them in heaven; and the saints of God are kept by his own power, *through faith* unto salvation. It is *faith* which for the present connects them with the heavenly inheritance, and which maintains the connection in the midst of circumstances, that might otherwise move them from their steadfastness. For this faith is not a mere speculative view of truth, but an active and powerful principle, which purifies the heart, works by love, and gives a final and certain victory over the world and all enemies.

Now this principle, through which God by his *power* keeps his own people, being of his own implanting, being part of that process by which he brings his people to salvation; as it is most precious, so it is most imperishable, and though subject to many trials, cannot be destroyed. It was, indeed, made for trials; they are the very element in which it lives, and instead of being hurt by them, it is only called into proper exercise, and fitted more and more for its peculiar office, so that though the children of God may be "for a season in heaviness, through manifold temptations, yet the trial of their faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, will be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ;" "for tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed."

Such is the Christian's hope, in its origin, grounds, and security. The topics we have touched in pursuing this subject have been too many to receive any adequate illustration in the course of this lecture. But it is of vast importance that the professing Christian should look at them as they stand in connection, especially in the present day, when loose and partial views of truth are so strangely prevalent, and mixed up with so many dangerous errors. We trust, therefore, that even so imperfect a sketch of those views of Divine truth embodied in the text will not be found unseasonable. We trust that, by this means, those of you who have tasted that God is gracious, and that Christ is precious, will be confirmed in your blessed hope, and disposed with the apostle sincerely to bless him who has begotten you again. We shall only further say to you, hold fast the beginning of your confidence steadfast unto the end. Seek to conduct your lives in conformity with the hopes you cherish; live as citizens of heaven, and aim at the present use and present application of this hope.

A hope so great and so divine,  
 May trials well endure;  
 And purge the soul from sense and sin,  
 As Christ himself is pure.

And should there be any within hearing who are conscious that as yet they are strangers to this blessed hope, let them now be invited to ponder well the immense difference between their condition and that of those who have that invaluable privilege, and not to rest contented in a state so awful.

To you the most seasonable word is, "Except ye repent, ye shall inevitably perish." But though this be the certain and infallible result of persisting in your present condition, you are not at liberty to consider your state as hopeless. As it is the duty of every minister of the gospel

to call all within hearing to repentance, so it is the duty of those who do hear to comply with the call. And how great encouragement is there to be found for all who are led to feel their lost condition as sinners, and who are concerned for their soul's salvation, in the many gracious and pressing invitations of Holy Scripture? "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money: come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price. Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."—Isaiah lv. 1, 6, 7. "Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call."—Acts ii. 38, 39.

No man who is addressed in the language of these promises and invitations can presume to say that God is unwilling to receive him, and thus excuse his indifference about his soul's welfare. And if any man, hearing these words, refuse to repent and turn to God, the blood of his soul must plainly be on his own head; and if he lives and dies without God, and Christ, and hope, there is no alternative but that, having thus put away from him the offers and invitations of Divine grace, he must have his final portion with those to whom it will be said, "Behold ye despisers, and wonder and perish."

## LECTURE XXI.

BY THE REV. JOHN FERGUSON, BRIDGE OF ALLAN.

## PSALM XXIII.

“ All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” All Scripture, therefore, should be studied, “ that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.” Certain portions of Scripture, however, are particularly suited for special reasons and circumstances of the Christian life. The Bible, blessed be the name of the Father of the redeemed, has sincere milk for babes, and strong meat for men ; and no child of God, duly searching the Scriptures, can fail to find his portion of food in season. But who of this family does not find a peculiar love to such portions of the Word as these—the Gospel according to John—the Epistle of Paul to the Romans—the Book of Psalms ? The Psalms have always held the highest place in the estimation of the Church of the living God ; and, as an eminent commentator remarks, “ the Christian’s use of them in the closet, and the minister’s in the pulpit, will generally increase with their growing experience of the power of true religion in their hearts.” Yet, precious as is the entire Book of Psalms, and unsurpassed as these holy songs be throughout the widest range even of inspired poetry, assuredly not one of them is more highly valued, more frequently studied, or more fondly remembered, than the Twenty-third Psalm. In every age, since the days of David, it has been the common property—“ the rejoicing of the heart,” of every member of that great mystical flock which the Good Shepherd is now gathering unto his fold on earth, and guiding through the wilderness to the green pastures of Paradise in heaven, “ where the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water.”

And we need not wonder that this should be the fact, for the Twenty-third Psalm is suited to all characters and conditions—to all frames and feelings that may exist among men. They who would enter into the kingdom of grace will here find the Great Shepherd—the new and the living way—the riches of Divine Goodness and mercy; and they who would follow their Lord to his rest, will here behold the provision made for their journey, and the home prepared for them at its close. They on whom the candle of the Lord shines most brightly may here find a subject with which to tune their harps to joy; while they who walk in darkness may find much to encourage them to stay themselves on God, and still look for light. The young man just entering on the perilous pursuits of life may here find lessons for guidance in the paths of righteousness: the tender child may here learn with the first lisplings of infancy to say, “The Lord is my Shepherd;” and the old man, descending into the vale of years, may be taught to sing, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.” Thus rich is the Twenty-third Psalm with instruction and consolation, amid the most diversified experience of this present life—thus stored with the promises and prospects of another and a better life beyond the grave. The Twenty-third Psalm may, indeed, be said to be a picture of the Gospel—a brief but beautiful system of theology; nay, as Luther said of the Psalter generally, “a little Bible.”

It is generally supposed that David was the author of this Psalm, and that he penned it after passing through the dangers and trials of his early life, and when he had reached a haven of comparative peace in old age. The imagery is precisely such as would most naturally suggest itself to the Shepherd King. The first four verses derived their illustrations from pastoral, the two last from royal, life. The royal Psalmist *enters at once* into the very middle of his subject. At once you see where his treasures are laid up—where his heart centres—what is his heaven. He boasts not of his wealth, his power, his rank: he boasts not that he has been taken from the sheep-cot of Jesse to be the Lord's anointed; that he has left the shepherd's rod to wield the sovereign's sceptre; that he has been raised from the lowliest to occupy the loftiest place among his fellow-men. It is the joy of his heart that he is a subject of Heaven's King—that he is a member of the flock of the Good Shepherd, that he has tasted the mercies of redeeming love and renewing grace. And David is not satisfied, as many are, with a vague and general kind of faith. It is not enough for him to know that there is a Shepherd of Israel—a Saviour of sinners. He has seen the Lord's

goodness to *himself*; for *himself* he has sought and found the blessings of salvation. The Lord is *my* Shepherd. You seem to see the very scenes which are passing before the eye of the inspired penman, while his inmost soul is thus stirred to praise the Lord: He thinks of the fields of Bethlehem, where he once tended his father's flocks, and of that hour of imminent danger when the Lord's faithfulness was his shield and buckler, and when the arm of the stripling was raised to slay both the lion and the bear; or of the valley of Elah—when the camp of the Philistines was ringing with sounds of triumph, and Israel's tents were full of sadness; but where the pebble of the brook, sent from the sling of Jesse's youngest son, smote the gigantic Goliath to the dust; or the Psalmist thinks of the time when he fled from his unrelenting enemy Saul, and was hunted like a partridge on the mountains; or of that still more trying hour when Absalom raised his parricidal hand against his grey-haired father, and when the aged monarch, deserted by his friends and favourites, driven forth from his palace, and the temple of his God, was constrained, weeping, to wend his weary way across the brook Kedron, and to sojourn in the wilderness. David has not forgotten these days of danger and deliverances, in which the eye of the Shepherd that never slumbers watched over him, and the arm of the Almighty protected him. And while these scenes pass before the eye of the Psalmist, his heart overflows with gratitude, and he gives all the praise and the glory to Him who had so wondrously preserved him in the past, and still so richly blessed him in the present hour.

But a greater salvation than David ever experienced in these seasons, was before his mind when he said, "The Lord is my Shepherd." Doubtless, while he thus wrote, he was looking in faith and hope to the days and doings of that Great Shepherd who was to come into this wilderness, and to lay down his life for the lost sheep of the House of Israel. Anticipating his advent and atonement, David here lays his hand on the head of the Lamb of God, and says, "This Jehovah-Jesus is *my* Shepherd, *my* Saviour." He is "all my salvation, and all my desire."

Do you, my hearers, seek thus to appropriate Jesus as *your own*? Do you say, my beloved is *mine*? Or are you quite satisfied with hearing that there is such a thing as salvation, and such a being as the Saviour, without being able to say, "*they are mine*?" It must be a personal—an individual matter. "What must *I* do to be saved?" "God be merciful to *me* a sinner." "Lord help *me*." "Lord remember *me*." And the Syrophenician pleads till the special answer is given: "O woman, great is *thy* faith; be it unto *thee* even as *thou* wilt." And the malefac-

tor must hear the promise, "To-day *thou* shalt be with me in Paradise."

If you do not—or dare not—thus appropriate Jesus, and say, the Lord *is* my Shepherd, why this doubt and fear? Have you not had more solemn calls to believe in Jesus—more striking evidence of the Saviour's love—than ever David had? He only saw the day of Christ afar off; you have seen the fulness of his time. He saw the Saviour's love dimly shadowed forth in type and emblem: you are called to behold it in facts and realities—Bethlehem—Gethsemane—Golgotha—Calvary. Surely Christ's cradle and his cross—his life and death—put the brand of blackest guilt on unbelief when found among us in our day of surpassing privilege. My hearers, David could say, "The Lord *is* my Shepherd:" Can you add, "And *he is mine*?"

But to make this profession in words is not enough. "Many say, Lord, Lord," yet do not his will. In our Master's name, we welcome the worst to him "who came to seek and save the lost." Yet ere you venture to assure yourselves that *you* are Christ's, see that you have the marks of his sheep. In a general sense, all men are his flock; for, however far they may wander from him, or however little they may acknowledge his care, still his arm protects—his eye watches—his bounty supports all. But the objects of Christ's special care—his true fold—are a chosen remnant—a little flock: Noah in the midst of the antediluvian world—Lot in Sodom—Israel in Goshen—Ezekiel's mourners—the seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal. Examine yourselves. To the law and the testimony. You hear the Lord of the flock himself describing the sheep: John x. 3 and 4. Christ's sheep hear him—know him—follow him. They are marked, marked in the ear—"my sheep hear my voice:" marked in the foot—"my sheep follow me." Have you these marks? Are your *spots* the spots of the children? Look well to this. Many mistake, and the mistake is fatal. It is true now as of old—many are called, few chosen. "Strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." But blame not the Good Shepherd either for the strait gate, or the scanty numbers. Over the gate which leads into the kingdom of grace is written in large and legible letters the blessed invitation—"Whosoever will, let him come;" and there too still stands the precious assurance, "Him that cometh unto me I will in nowise cast out." If the gate is strait then, and the way narrow, man's unbelief and man's ungodliness are the cause. The gate is strait to us, because we would carry in the world with us; the way is narrow, because we would take all our lusts and idols along with us. For though this gate



that leadeth unto Christ's fold will admit the sinner, it will not admit his sins: therefore the many *will not enter*.

"By me," says the Good Shepherd, "if any man enter in, he shall be saved." The believer enters in, and the blessings of salvation even "unto the utmost bounds of the everlasting hills," arise before the eye of faith. He stands, like the Pilgrims on the Delectable Mountains, and beholds the land of Beulah and the gates of the Celestial City. David, overpowered with the fair prospect, can describe only a few of its glories. "I shall not want." Observe the connection. Why was David assured that he should never want? Because Canaan was his kingdom? Because the riches of the land that flowed with milk and honey replenished his treasury? Because hosts of friends and subjects were around him ever ready to come and go at their monarch's bidding? Nay, David's confidence was not like that of the man who said, "Soul, thou hast laid up much good for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." Right well David knew that all this would not secure him against want. Full well the hatred of Saul, the cursing of Shimei, the rebellion of Absalom, had taught him the sad but salutary lesson, that the friendship of man is a broken reed, and the treasures of earth a miserable portion. But the Psalmist had been led from the broken cisterns to the true fountain of living water. How then could he want? Had he not the Omnipotent to protect him, the Omnipresent to watch over him—the unchangeable, the Almighty, the ever merciful, to be his friend and his portion? Yes, the Lord himself—not his gifts, his salvation, his heaven merely—but the Lord himself, is the portion of every believer's heritage. Yes, not only all that God *has*, but all that God *is*—God himself belongs to the believer; for thus the better covenant runs: "I will be *their God*." All that I am to myself, I am to them. Therefore, if God cannot want, as little can his people. They are "heirs of God—joint heirs with Christ." Theirs is his righteousness—his power—his love—his faithfulness—his all. Yea, Jehovah-Jesus is their Shepherd—their Shepherd is Jehovah-Jesus; and, therefore, as certainly as God *is*, so certainly the conclusion follows, the people of God shall not want. "He that spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Dear friends, would you lack so good a thing? Come and take the Lord for your Shepherd. Would you truly enrich your families, and ennoble your children? Come yourselves, and seek to bring them with you to enter into covenant with the Lord. Come, and then you will not only have the bounties of Providence, and the riches of earth, but heaven will open its windows, and

eternity will pour its treasures upon you, and God himself will enrich you with his own infinite fulness. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." Your wants may be innumerable; but your fulness in God is inexhaustible. "All things *are yours*." Miracles may not be wrought for you, but mercy will find a channel for the conveyance of every good thing. Ravens may not bring food to you, as they did to Elijah at the brook Cherith; manna may not descend upon you, as upon Israel, from heaven; and Horeb may not open its flinty sides to pour out the welling floods; but the promise stands firm as the throne of the Eternal. "Bread shall be given you, and water shall be sure." What had Egypt throughout all her fair and fertile provinces, when God was against her? What lacked Israel even in the wilderness, when her Shepherd led Joseph like a flock? Moses on the borders of the rest could appeal to them and say—"The Lord thy God hath blessed thee in all the works of thy hand: He knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness: these forty years the Lord thy God hath been with thee; *thou hast lacked nothing*." Far better, then, to be one of the flock of the Good Shepherd than of the family of princes: far better to be a subject of Heaven's Lord than to sway the sceptre over the mightiest empire of the earth.

In the second verse the Psalmist shows how the wants of the flock, as they journey through the wilderness, are supplied by the Shepherd. "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters." What are the wants of the flock of an earthly pasture? Simply these: food, drink, repose, and protection. If these are supplied, they do not want. And such are the wants, and such the supplies of the mystical flock. The Heavenly Shepherd is ever tending and feeding his flock; he carries his lambs in his bosom, and gently leads those that are with young. Who shall overcome those whom the Shepherd, that never slumbers, keeps?

See how the Psalmist delights to speak of the Shepherd as ever present with the flock, and to see his hand in every gift. *He maketh to lie down*; he leadeth by still waters; he restoreth the soul; he leads in the path of righteousness, for his name's sake. This makes every blessing doubly sweet, when we see the hand from which it drops.

But what are his pastures? The ordinances of his grace: the Word, the Gospel, the Sabbath, prayer, sacraments. Into these pastures Jesus conducts the waters of the sanctuary—"the river whose streams make glad the city of God." In other words, Jesus accompanies the ordinances of his grace with the reviving and refreshing operations of

the Holy Spirit. Therefore, these pastures are green : therefore, they afford food and nourishment to the soul. Yea, they are thus—because always watered by the rains and dews of heaven—*ever green*. In all seasons the flock find their food ; no frost nor flood ; no blight nor drought ; no summer's sun nor winter's snow shall ever desolate these green pastures. The believer who follows the Shepherd shall find water, and refreshment, and consolation from the comforter, even under the scorching sun and the burning sands of the desert. “ When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them, I will open *rivers* in *high* places, and *fountains* in the *midst* of *valleys* ; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.”

And, however numerous the flock, yet there is room and food for all who will enter. Our first parents were invited into these pastures, when they were expelled from paradise—Abel walked and died in them—Noah found them, even when the flood covered the earth—Abraham and the patriarchs were led in them during their mortal pilgrimage—and the Shepherd of Israel summoned the millions of that people to walk up and down in them—and all who heard his voice and followed his steps, there found food for their souls. And so is it still. The millions of Christ's flock now in the east, and west, and north, and south, here find plenty ; and when nations shall be born in a day, still they will find these pastures green and “ soul satiating.” My hearers, if they bring no refreshment to you, it must be because your heart is not right with God.

Many who profess themselves of the flock of Jesus are satisfied to be led *into and through* these green pastures. The Psalmist sought to *lie down in them*. Are you, my dear friends, of the number of those who are quite satisfied with the formal and occasional observance of ordinances ? Are they a duty but not a delight ? Or do you seek them, or rather Christ in them, as the rest and refreshment of your soul. Try yourselves. Can you be of Christ's flock, if you lie not down in Christ's fold ? What is the language, not of your lips but of your heart, regarding these pastures—the Bible—the Sabbath—prayer ? What was the first mark of conversion to the Lord in the case of Saul ? “ Behold, he prayeth.” What was the last exercise on earth of the martyr Stephen ? Still, behold, he prayeth—“ Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”

But we may still more closely see from the third verse, that, much as David prized the means of grace, it was just because he found grace, yea God—in them. “ He restoreth my soul : he leadeth me in the paths

of righteousness for his name's sake." Ruin through Adam, Redemption in Christ, Regeneration by the Spirit, are here set forth. There is ruin, otherwise restoration would not be needed. "All we like sheep have gone astray: we have turned every one to his own way." But, there is redemption in Christ; justification by his blood, "even for his name's sake." "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquities of us all." "The Good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." Nor is this all. After he had redeemed by his blood, he must reclaim them from their wanderings and bring them back to his fold. He must renew by his spirit those whom he has bought with his blood. Therefore the Psalmist says, "He restoreth my soul." And this regeneration goes on to perfect sanctification. "He leadeth me into the paths of righteousness." Thus his voice proclaims the three great doctrines of the Gospel, and presents to us the three great blessings of salvation: Regeneration, Justification, and Sanctification. How closely they follow one another! how inseparably are they connected in the case of every believer! links of that great golden chain which God has let down from heaven to draw his own to himself. What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.

Verse 4, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." In the East, the fold where the flock reposes, or the pastures in which they roam, are peculiarly exposed to the assaults of beasts of prey; and by day and by night the shepherd's care must be vigilantly put forth, while with "crook" he guides, or with "staff" he protects, his weak and helpless charge. Need I say how these words declare the dangers to which the flock of Christ's fold are exposed, and the unslumbering guardianship of their Good Shepherd. Perils may compass and enemies may assail—the lion may roar and the wolf may prowl—but the eye of the Shepherd is ever upon the flock, and his arm is around them. "His presence makes darkness light, and crooked things straight;" and these are the words of this Faithful and Mighty One: "My sheep shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." "It is the Father's good pleasure to give them the kingdom."

"The valley of the shadow of death" may mean those more dark and trying seasons, which the followers of Jesus, after the example of Him who was "the man of sorrows," must experience on their way to rest. The way to Canaan is ever through the wilderness. The valley of humiliation must be trodden by all who would ascend the Hill of God above. The Cross now—the Crown hereafter. Or the valley of the shadow of death may mean the path which leads down to the dark

dwelling-house of the grave. Job, speaking of the grave, calls it "the land of darkness, and the shadow of death." It is appointed unto all men once to die: "Between the part of the flock on earth, and that which is gone to heaven, death lies like a dark valley that must be passed in going from one to the other." The chosen people must cross Jordan ere they reach Jerusalem.

But in all the thorny paths which the flock must tread, and amid the perils of the last journey, see the peace and safety which the Shepherd has secured for them. Amid the deepest darkness, rising up before his eye, as he looks on the future, the Psalmist sees the light of his Saviour's countenance shining forth. Every word seems rich with sweetest meaning. It is the valley of the *shadow* of death. Dark and dreadful in appearance, but in reality only a *shadow*. And justly is death to the believer represented as a shadow, for Christ hath robbed it of its sting. "When the bee has left its sting in any one, it has no more power to hurt; death has left its sting in the humanity of Christ, and has no more power to hurt his child." If death is thus to the believer only a shadow, why should you, my hearers, if the Lord is your shepherd, fear death? A painted lion will not tear; a painted fire will not burn. The shadow of a serpent will not sting, nor will the shadow of a sword kill—why, then, should you not sing, "O, death, where is thy sting; O, grave, where is thy victory."

The Psalmist says, "Yea, though I *walk through* the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." They who die without an interest in Jesus go down to the place of death to *dwell* there for ever. They sink not only into the grave, but into the grave of hell. The believer enters this valley of death only to pass through it; for, however deep and dark, not one of all the millions of the redeemed has perished there. They have *passed through* to the land of life and light on the other side. But the Psalmist not only knows that he will then be safe from evil itself, but from the *dread* of evil. I will *fear* no evil. So many say, but falsely. The worldling, in the heat and hurry of earthly pursuits—the young man in the midst of unhallowed pleasures—the infidel in health and strength, when the day of danger and death seems far away, says in his heart, or vainly boasts, that he has no fear of the great enemy. But how many who daringly scoff at him in the distance, quail and cower in agony and despair when the final encounter comes, and they must grapple hand to hand with the adversary. Then even an apostate Julian has been made to confess, "O, Galilean, thou hast conquered;" an infidel Voltaire, with his dying shrieks, has driven his own wretched infidel companions in terror from

his bed-side ; and a blaspheming Paine, in dread of death, and eternity beyond it, has cursed the day of his birth. But the Psalmist, and every believer, may unhesitatingly say, " Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." And the ground of this confidence is sure and sufficient—" For thou art with me." He alone can enter into that valley with the believer, and he alone can save there. Amid other dangers and difficulties, the light of a brother's eye may animate the pilgrim ; the strength of a brother's arm may aid him ; and the sympathy of a brother's heart may comfort him ; but all these fail the traveller to eternity in life's last stage. All these leave him when he draws near to the brink of the deep Jordan. Alone, the pilgrim must enter these dark waters—alone, he must struggle with these stormy waves—alone, he must stem these overwhelming floods—alone, he must seek a footing on that farther shore, and there—alone—the spirit must stand before its God and its Judge. But, then, when all earth would strive in vain to aid, and when all hell would put forth its power to destroy—Jesus is with his arm to sustain and to save. He, who has trodden the same path, and triumphed over the same perils—He, who on this very field hath encountered the last enemy, and overcome all the principalities and powers of death and hell—He is there making each of his followers to share in his victory ; and, by the way of the valley and the shadow of death, he conducts to the land of everlasting life.

In the two last verses, the Psalmist employs imagery, suggested by scenes of regal magnificence, to describe the Lord's abounding goodness to the believer in time, and the glory that awaits him through eternity.

Plenty, peace, prosperity, are, the Psalmist repeats in the 5th verse, his portion ; " plenty," for the Lord himself spreads the table and provides the feast ; " peace"—the Lord's peace—peace in the midst of enemies, for " when he giveth quietness, who can make trouble ;" " prosperity"—soul prosperity, (anointest my head with oil, or according to the marginal translation, *makest fat*) the anointing of the Holy One. And David knew that as his cup was thus full to overflowing now, so it would continue. Verse 6, " Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." Goodness and mercy—the gifts of Providence—the blessings of grace, includes all that man can ever need on earth ; and these are the believer's portion. The Psalmist represents them as following the believer like an unfailling stream, satisfying him like an inexhaustible fountain. For mark these things as to the manner in which goodness and mercy are the portion of God's servants. " They follow me ;" they are not like a summer shower, soon ceasing, or like a shallow

brook, soon passing away. They go with him where he goes, and they dwell with him where he dwells. Mark their continuance, "all the days of my life:" for whom the Lord loves, he loves unto the end. Mark their constancy, "*all the days,*" therefore every day of his life; like the manna falling every day round Israel's tent—like the food which the ravens brought every morning to Elijah at Cherith's brook, for God says, "As thy day, so shall thy strength be." And, finally, mark the certainty of this portion. *No ifs and buts*—no perhaps, or perchance, or peradventure. "Goodness and mercy *shall surely* follow me all the days of my life." And was this full flood of the divine goodness and mercy to fail then, or to forsake the Psalmist at that hour? No; he saw the stream at the end of earth's journey, and at the close of this present life, widening and deepening into the ocean of eternal and infinite bliss, and he then adds, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." "*For ever.*" This, and this alone, was needed to complete the picture. And the "covenant is well ordered in all things and sure;" its blessings are everlasting as they are infinite. Eternity is stamped on the blessings of the flock of the Good Shepherd. This is the grand distinguishing feature of heaven. Every object, every being there is destined for eternity. If there are pleasures there for us, they are "pleasures for evermore;" if there is a house there for us, it is an "house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens;" if we shall have an inheritance there, it will be an "inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away." If holy there, holy for ever; "there shall in nowise enter there anything that defileth;" if happy there, happy for ever, "for they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat, for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

Such, followers of Jesus, she epof his fold, believing, regenerated, justified ones, such are your privileges on earth, your portion in heaven; such your blessings for time and through eternity. Happy people; blessed are ye! See to it, then, children of the kingdom, heirs of glory, that ye follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth, and that ye walk worthy of your high vocation. Live like yourselves, live like your master. Let the world see that the promises of God are not empty sounds, that the privileges of the saints are not mere shadows. Let your heavenly mindedness, your onward progress, your increasing godliness, prove the reality of your faith, the steadfastness of your hope, the truth of your love to him who "loved you, and gave himself for you."

Unbelievers, impenitent, unregenerate ones! What, compared with

these, are your present enjoyments? What your future hopes? Take this Twenty-third Psalm, examine its offers, and put them into one scale of the balance, and take *all, all* that the world can promise, and put it into the other, and then ask yourself which presents the better portion. And remember, one or other you must embrace. You must be gathered now into the fold of the Good Shepherd, or continue to wander from the right way and perish. You must now know the love of the Good Shepherd, or hereafter abide the "wrath of the Lamb" of God.



## LECTURE XXII.

JESUS ANOINTED BY A WEEPING PENITENT IN THE HOUSE OF SIMON THE PHARISEE: MUCH LOVE SHOWN WHERE MUCH SIN HAS BEEN FORGIVEN.

BY THE REV. JAMES GRIERSON, ERROL.

“ And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him,” &c.—LUKE vii. 36-50.

THE Pharisees, as a body, though they became extremely jealous of our Lord's popularity and success as a teacher, took otherwise no interest in his doctrine, and manifested no desire to hear him. They despised those who felt and acted differently—so much so, that when some of their own officers, after having unexpectedly had an opportunity of listening to him, exclaimed, “ Never man spake like this man,” they boastfully and contemptuously demanded, “ Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?” John vii. 26-28.

But while these were the general sentiments entertained by the Pharisees as a body, there were among them individuals who, without showing any desire or readiness to become the disciples of Christ, occasionally manifested a desire to become better acquainted with his views and pretensions. Of this number was the individual mentioned in the passage before us, who invited our Lord to eat or dine with him. We are not expressly informed what were the motives by which this Pharisee was actuated in addressing to him the invitation in question; but from the reflection which we are told he made to himself, when he observed the conduct of his guest, in receiving the tokens of affection and respect which were shown to him by a woman who had been a notorious sinner, we are led to infer that he was desirous to have an opportunity of judging, from personal observation, whether or not Jesus was really a prophet, and what were the doctrines which, professedly in that capacity, he had to unfold. Be this, however, as it may, we are certain, from the exhibition which is here presented of the character and prejudices of the Pharisee, that our Lord saw in him enough both to lament and condemn. Still, he did not refuse to accept the invitation. He had on several occasions spoken with just though unusual severity of the Pharisees in general; but this did not lead him to treat every individual of the sect alike,

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or to decline all social intercourse with those whose sentiments were not entirely sound, or whose hearts were not undeniably renewed. On the contrary, he was ready at once to manifest a sociable disposition and embrace an opportunity of doing them good, how much soever his own motives might be misunderstood or misrepresented. Whatever imperfections or prejudices might mingle with the Pharisee's motives for wishing to meet with him, he did not refuse to gratify his wishes. Frankly and readily accepting the invitation, "he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat." The humility and condescension of our Lord in doing so, is the more worthy of observation, that, both from the language now quoted, and from the disclosures made in the course of the entertainment, it appears that he did not receive from his entertainer even the customary tokens of affection and respect.

There was one, however, who, though neither an entertainer nor a guest, did not fail to evince the deep sense which she had of the personal dignity and excellence of him who, on this occasion, conferred rather than accepted an honour, by occupying a place at the table of the Pharisee. This was "a woman in the city who was a sinner;" who, "when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment."

I. It is to this individual that our attention is, in the first place, to be directed.

Her name is not given, but only her character. We are not told who she was, but what she had been, and how she acted when she had obtained admission into the apartment in which Jesus was entertained. Tradition would have it that the person here referred to was Mary Magdalene, whose name is mentioned, indeed, in the second verse of the following chapter, but nowise in connection with the occurrences narrated in the passage now under consideration, nor in such a way as to afford any countenance to the idea that Mary Magdalene had at any time been a person of notoriously immoral and profligate habits. We know of no character, mentioned in Scripture, with which greater or more unwarrantable liberties have been taken, than the character of this individual. Her name has, through a sort of conventional delusion, become a term of distinction for a particular class of her own sex, who, if now regarded as penitent, have still cleaving to them the remembered infamy of a previous course of shocking impurity; and the injustice done to her memory has been perpetuated, and, as it were, consecrated, by bestowing her name on those humane and salutary institutions which are devoted to the rescue, protection, and refor-

mation of individuals of the class to which she has been, without a vestige of evidence, supposed to belong. Instead of being a sinner, in the sense in which the term is evidently applied to the woman spoken of in our text—that is, instead of having been a great sinner and open profligate, Mary Magdalene appears rather to have been, not only a person of respectability, but of distinction, if we may judge from the circumstance of her being associated in the sacred narrative with Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward. She was also, it is true, a great sufferer; for it was she, "out of whom," as we are told, "Jesus had cast seven devils." For this, and other benefits still more immediately connected with the welfare of her soul, she, too, as well as the other individual here mentioned, was under the deepest feeling of her obligations to Christ. If she had not anointed him while living, she had, along with others, prepared the spices with which to honour and embalm his body in the sepulchre; and she was honoured to be the very first to whom he showed himself alive, after he had lain there for a time—addressing her affectionately by her name, and entrusting her with a special and important message to his brethren. (John xx. 11-18.) Let us henceforth remember, then, that Mary Magdalene cannot have been the person referred to in the passage before us—that, in attaching to her name the epithet of Magdalene, nothing more was intended than to distinguish her from the other Marys among our Lord's female friends, she being probably a native of the town of *Magdala*; and that there is no more authority for regarding that as an epithet of reproach, or, at least, of connecting it with the idea of former vices, than there is for regarding the term Jesus the Nazarene, as originally signifying anything more than Jesus of Nazareth.

And while it thus appears evident that the person who here anointed our Lord's feet was not Mary Magdalene, it is not less evident that it was not Mary, the sister of Lazarus. The latter, also, it is evident, anointed his feet; but it was not at Capernaum, in the house of Simon the Pharisee, but in Bethany, in her own brother's house, at a much later period, and under circumstances altogether different; and no one ever insinuated or imagined that Mary of Bethany had ever, at any period of her history, been addicted to the practices imputed to the individual mentioned in the text. Subsequent to both of these, there was a third instance of anointing Christ. This took place in the house of Simon the leper—that is, who had *once* been a leper; and though performed, as in the previous instance, by a woman, whose name is not recorded, the whole circumstances are so different, that there is no apology for confounding the one with the other. Just in the same way that our Lord has commemorated the liberality of the poor widow in casting her

two mites, even all that she had, into the treasury of the Temple, while he has not communicated her name, so has he deemed it expedient to withhold the names of two of the persons who anointed him, although in the case of one of them expressly, and both of them virtually, he has said, in regard to the anointing itself, "Verily, I say unto you, wheresoever his gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her."

This being the case, we may well be content to remain ignorant of the name of the woman who here obtained admittance into the house of Simon the Pharisee. It may seem strange, however, that one of her character, even if then, though but recently, changed, should have been permitted, how humble and importunate soever in her application, to enter the house and guest-chamber of such a person. She was certainly uninvited, and anything but welcomed, by the entertainer. It was the custom, however, of the East, and continues to be to this day, for others besides guests to be present at entertainments, and to "speak to those at table on business or the news of the day."\* This may so far explain her being found in such a place. But it was something very different from mere curiosity, or ordinary business, that induced her to seek admittance. It was not with Simon or the general company of his guests that she had to do. One object of interest, and one alone, engrossed her thoughts. That was One who was himself but lightly esteemed—Jesus, who alone had the right to spurn her from his presence, and who yet had spoken to her the words of eternal life.

This poor sinner had very different reasons from those of the Pharisee for wishing to see Jesus. The recent miracle of restoring to life the widow of Nain's son, had produced, in regard to its author, a deep and general impression. "There came," we are told, "a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, that a great prophet is risen up among us; and that God hath visited his people. And this rumour of him went forth throughout all Judea." Simon, among others, wished to know something more perfectly concerning him, especially as to whether or not he was a prophet; and, as he was in a situation in life which enabled him to give an entertainment, he seems to have thought that the best way of attaining his object was to get Jesus to become his guest. The motives of the poor sinner were of a far higher and more interesting nature. She also had heard the fame of him who had raised the dead, and instead of merely musing whether he was a prophet, she seems to have been fully persuaded that this was the case; nay, that he was the Great Prophet—the promised Messiah—the Saviour of sinners. To

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\* See Mission of Inquiry to the Jews. First Edition, p. 93.

this conclusion she had come, not merely, as it would seem, because of the miracles which he had done, and of the sublime and peculiar doctrines which he had taught—speaking among the people such things as no other man had ever spoken—but because he had spoken in such a way as to bring her individually under the deepest convictions of her guilt and danger, and to work in her soul that “godly sorrow which worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of.” The convictions, in short, under which she had been brought, were less akin to those of Nicodemus than those of her fellow-sinner, the woman of Samaria. She was ready to say, “Come, see a man who told me all things that ever I did : is not this the Christ?” Yet all that she had heard of him only made her wish to hear more. She had already tasted of the fountain of living-waters ; and the language of her soul was, let me drink again—let me drink abundantly—let me drink evermore. She already knew somewhat of “the way of the Lord,” but she wished to have it “expounded” to her “more perfectly.” She felt as if it had been said to her by the voice of God himself, Call on the name of the Lord, and thou shalt be saved. Call and wait on Jesus, “who shall tell thee words whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.” The narrative, indeed, by telling us that she brought with her an alabaster box of ointment, distinctly intimates that she entered the house for the very purpose of anointing Jesus ; and this circumstance, while it demonstrates the exalted ideas which she entertained of his personal excellence and dignity, shows also, in connection with the other circumstances to which we have just adverted, that she entertained a deep and affecting sense of her special obligations to him in regard to the concerns of her soul.

But whatever may thus be learned as to her existing character, the state of her convictions and feelings, from the motives by which she appears to have been influenced in seeking admittance to the presence of our Lord, we may learn something still more precisely by attending to the actions which she performed, and the feelings which she manifested, after being admitted.

1. She evinced her humility and her godly sorrow.

Much as this poor sinner desired to enjoy the presence of our Lord, so humble and abashed was she when she came into it, that, instead of standing in front of him, or looking him in the face, she took her place behind him, standing beside the couch on which he reclined at table, according to the custom of the country at the time, with his feet sloping backwards, and thus sufficiently exposed and within her reach to receive those respectful and affectionate assiduities which she was prepared to render. She came for the purpose of anointing him with ointment, or fragrant oil ; but instead of venturing to anoint his head, as was done

on another occasion, she only presumed to anoint his feet. It was less remarkable that she should seek to *wash* his feet, for that was but the ordinary courtesy shown to a guest, and, in the present instance, withheld from Jesus by his entertainer; but her humility, as well as her affection, was further displayed by her kissing his feet, after she had watered them with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. The language of her soul at that moment was more expressive of humility than the language of Abigail toward David, when she said, "Behold, let thine handmaid be a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my Lord."

Nor did her humility proceed only from the profound sense which she had of his surpassing excellence and dignity. It proceeded partly from the feeling of her own past guilt and exceeding unworthiness. Her humility, in other words, was closely associated with her deep and godly sorrow. It was the sorrow, not only of having degraded herself, of having been a grief of heart to her friends and a disgrace to her sex; nay, not only of having lived in opposition to the law of a holy God, but of having lived in opposition to the mind and will of One who had shown her such kindness and compassion, and such concern for her eternal welfare as had been shown by that wondrous person in whom were so signally combined the sympathies of the human heart, with the adorable attributes of Godhead.

2. But, by her conduct in the guest chamber, the penitent also evinced her gratitude and affection.

Great as were her modesty and humility, she did not permit these feelings to keep her back, even in the presence of uncharitable observers, from expressing her unspeakable obligations and ardent attachment to Jesus. The tears which she shed were too copious not to be the effect of deep and overwhelming emotions. She had furnished herself with the ointment which she brought, but she needed no preparation for her tears. They were tears of affection not less than of sorrow. They were what she could neither repress nor conceal. They fell unbidden, and they fell so copiously, that it might justly have been said that her "eyes were a fountain of tears." They were so *showered* on the Saviour's feet, that she felt as if she were incommoding him; and yet the very method which she adopted of apologizing, as it were, for the liberty which she had taken, and of removing the discomfort which she had caused, was only a further proof of her humility and devoted attachment—she wiped his feet *with the hairs of her head*, and again kissed them, in the continued ardour of her gratitude, when her tears were wiped away. Our Lord himself has borne testimony to the feelings which prompted these acts of the penitent's tenderness, by telling us, in a sub-

sequent verse, that "she loved much." And so do all who have at once a true sense of sin, and a sweet sense of forgiveness.

3. The penitent here evinced her profound sense of the veneration and homage that were due to Christ.

She came for the express purpose of *anointing* him—not only of acknowledging her personal obligations and attachment to him, but of owning and honouring him as the Messiah or Anointed One. She came to do him homage, similar to that which had been done to him at his birth, when the wise men from the East came and "presented unto him gifts—gold, and frankincense, and myrrh." The gratitude and affection which she felt were expressed to him, not as a merely human or ordinary benefactor. He was the object of her faith not less than of her love. She was owning him whom God had already and most signally owned. She came to anoint One whom God had already "anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows." She had experimentally found Him of whom Moses, in the law and the prophets, had spoken. She hailed him as the salvation of Israel, and devoutly cleaved to him as all her salvation and all her desire.

In all the respects which we have now been considering, the conduct of the poor sinner must approve itself to every serious and thinking mind, as most suitable and affecting. It was most creditable to herself, and evidently acceptable and gratifying to the Saviour. It gave great offence, however, to his entertainer. "Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him; for she is a sinner."

II. The next subject, then, which now solicits our attention, is the way in which our Lord met the inward surmises and complaints of the Pharisee, and in which he not only vindicated the conduct of the weeping penitent, but set it forth as an honourable contrast to the conduct of the Pharisee himself.

The reflection which the Pharisee here made within himself, besides intimating the doubts which he had previously entertained as to the prophetic character of his guest, distinctly implies the impression which he had taken up, that no one really invested with that character could either fail to be acquainted with the past life of every individual, however private, or suffer one whose life had been openly immoral, to render him such assiduities as those which Jesus had just received. For that impression, however, there was surely no foundation. Jesus was indeed fully aware that this woman was, even in the Pharisee's acceptance of the term, a *sinner*, but he gloried in that for which he

was reproached by the scribes and Pharisees, namely, in being the "friend of publicans and sinners." They contemptuously said, "this man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them;" and all this was true. He came into the world for the very purpose of "saving sinners, even the chief," and that by dying for them—"dying for the ungodly." But all this, instead of being discreditable to Christ, was the very contrary. The woman was a sinner, and yet he received her graciously, but in so doing, he manifested not less disapprobation of her sins, than benevolent concern for her soul.

In taking up the secret impression which has now been mentioned, the Pharisee judged as unwarrantably in regard to Christ, as he felt uncharitably in regard to the woman; but since his unwarrantable surmises were not expressed, our Lord took the most tender, and, at the same time, the most effectual way of meeting and exposing them. In the hearing of the company he said to him, "Simon," for this, as here first intimated, was his name, "Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee." This naturally arrested the attention both of Simon and of his guests; and, although it is evident that, in his existing state of mind, the appellation *master*, as addressed by him to our Lord, must have been used in mere ceremony, if not indeed in direct irony, he formally replied to him, "Master, say on."

Our Lord then delivered one of his most beautiful, apposite, and instructive parables. "There was a certain creditor," said he, "who had two debtors: the one owed him five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay," both being in this respect alike, "he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore," continued our Lord, still addressing himself to Simon, "tell me which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, thou hast judged rightly." Now, in this, as in his other parables, our Lord, under a most skilful and familiar representation, prepared the way for the admission of most important truths, and, by evading or disarming the prejudices of his hearers, obtained from them the calm deliverance of their understandings, and the honest verdict of their consciences. This parable sets forth the great, practical, and acknowledged truth that every debtor is, as the name itself implies, under an obligation to pay what he owes, or otherwise to make satisfaction to his creditor; that, whether the sum owing be great or small, when there is really no means of paying it, and when the debtor not only acknowledges his obligation, but sincerely laments his inability, it is the part of a creditor who himself looks for mercy, to extend it to his helpless and humbled debtor; and that, when he generously does so, it is no less the part of the other to receive the boon, not with



insolent indifference, but with unfeigned thankfulness, and with a love in some degree commensurate with that which has been manifested in his forgiveness.

But while the parable sets forth these important truths as to the duties to be performed and the feelings to be exercised between ordinary creditors and debtors, it brings out, as it was expressly intended to do, the relation in which sinners, before and after pardon, stand to God; and, more especially, the relation in which the woman whose conduct had secretly given such offence to Simon, and that in which Simon himself stood to the speaker—to that Jesus whom the one loved, without having the means of entertaining him, and whom the other had received to an entertainment, without affording any evidence of loving him.

1. Taking up this as the obvious scope of the parable, it may be observed, in the *first* place, that the creditor to whom the speaker here seeks to draw our thoughts, is God, the author of the forgiveness of sins; for “who can forgive sins but God only?” or, what is perhaps still more significantly and emphatically meant, to Jesus Christ himself, who here, as on other occasions, exercised one of the highest prerogatives of Godhead, not only by *pronouncing* forgiveness of sins on the woman who was a sinner, but by intimating that it was in consequence of his being the *author* of her forgiveness, that he had become the object of her gratitude and love.

2. But, *secondly*, we learn from this to regard sin as a debt, in which all mankind are more or less deeply involved. Strictly speaking, indeed, it is, in the first instance, obedience to the divine law—perfect obedience in all things, at all times, and under all circumstances, that constitutes our debt. This is what we owed to God at first, and this is what we *owe* to him still. But the moment that we ceased to render it and became incapable—morally, and, therefore, culpably incapable—of rendering it again, that moment we incurred the debt of punishment; we became liable to all the penalties which the law had denounced against transgression; we were given to know that “the wages of sin is death,” and that, so far as *the law* speaks on the subject, “there remaineth” nothing but “a certain fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries”—that recompense of our error which is alike righteous and awful. As subjects of the divine government, we are all “debtors to the whole law,” and “all have sinned and came short of the glory of God.” In respect of the fall, and the consequent corruption of our whole nature, all are alike sinful, and are “by nature the children of wrath;” and although, in respect of actual transgressions, some of which, in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, are much more heinous in the sight of God than others,” there

are great diversities among sinners as to the character and amount of their criminality, yet all are so heavily laden with sin, as to stand greatly in need of that forgiveness which he, and he only, can bestow.

3. This leads us to remark, in the *third* place, that how greatly soever sinners may differ as to the nature and degrees of their guilt, or, in other words, as to the debts which they have contracted, they are all alike unable to pay what they owe, or to atone for their own sins. Whether they be represented by the debtor that owed "fifty pence," or by the debtor that owed "five hundred pence," they are all alike incapable of paying what they owe, while God has an unquestionable and undiminished right to exact the uttermost farthing in the form of penalty, if not of performance, or seeing that performance is awaiting. We cannot cancel the past; we cannot meet the demands of the present and how then can we afford any security for the future?

4. But, *fourthly*, we learn from the parable that the creditor referred to, is ready frankly to forgive sinners of all descriptions and degrees of guilt. He himself has provided for them a ransom—nay, in the person of Christ, he has given *himself* a ransom for them. Pardon has been purchased on behalf of his people by the death and righteousness of the blessed Redeemer; it is fully proclaimed and freely offered to the chief of sinners; they are not only exhorted, but besought and entreated, in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to God; and the only terms that are insisted on, as indispensable to the actual enjoyment of the offered blessing, are simply that they should accept of it as a free, unmerited gift; that, through the promised aid of the Holy Spirit, they should cordially embrace Christ, and, in coming to him, come away from their sins, unreservedly and for ever. The warrant and the welcome to the precious pardon, are embodied in the invitation, and in it alone; but whenever the invitation is cordially accepted, it must necessarily follow that the grateful, humble, and pardoned sinner will recognise the obligation, and adopt the resolution of henceforth "living not to himself, but unto him who died for him, and rose again."

5. This leads us, in the *fifth* place, to remark, as taught in the parable, that gratitude and love are the proper acknowledgment and fruit of pardon, and that the strength and intensity of these feelings should be in proportion to the number and greatness of the sins which have been forgiven. It is altogether unwarrantable to say, either that the greatest sinners have, when converted, generally become the greatest saints, or that, even in those instances where this has been the case, the heinousness of former sins has been eminently and specially instrumental in producing the effect. It would be just as rational to allege that the mortal diseases which were cured only by the miraculous interposition

of Christ, were conducive to the vigorous health which the persons who had laboured under them afterwards enjoyed. There is no question, however, that the greater the number and aggravations of the sins for which a sinner has obtained forgiveness, the greater should be his sense of obligation to Him through whom it has been obtained, or by whom it has been bestowed; and that the greater his sense of obligation, the greater also will be the ardour and amount of his love.

Our Lord had already obtained from Simon a ready and distinct admission of this principle, so far as related to an ordinary debtor and creditor. Simon had at once admitted, on the simple enunciation of the parable, that that debtor to whom most had been forgiven, might be expected, as he was bound, to show the greatest amount and ardour of love. And was not the principle equally applicable to the case in which the debtor received forgiveness, not for debts of a merely pecuniary kind, but for moral transgressions and delinquencies? the case in which the creditor was not a mere man, himself in need of mercy, but the Almighty God to whom no righteousness could reach, on whom no favour could be conferred, and by whom no remuneration could be received. But if this application of the principle was granted, then all was granted that was necessary, either to explain or to vindicate the conduct of the woman who stood behind our Lord, and the condescension with which he had accepted of her affectionate assiduities; while it served too well, at the same time, to account for the absence, on the part of Simon himself, of that courtesy and kindness which would otherwise have been shown to his most distinguished guest.

This was the point on which the blessed Saviour desired to fasten the attention of the Pharisee; and, for this purpose, he drew out and set before him such a striking and humbling contrast as he could never afterwards fail to remember. Simon had at first doubted whether Jesus was a prophet, and had subsequently come to the inward conclusion that he was not. This conclusion, however, not being avowed or divulged to any around him, could be known only to himself, and to Him from whom the secrets and surmises of no one heart can be concealed. Yet so thoroughly was it known by Jesus, that the very parable which he had spoken, had evidently been spoken, and perhaps constructed, with the intention of making the man himself better acquainted than he was with what had been passing in his own heart! Simon had evidently now to deal with One who "knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man; for he knew what was in man." He had rashly concluded him to be no prophet; and now, on the spot, he had been convicted of his rashness and his error; not by the distant fulfilment of

some recorded prediction, nor by the attestation of some miraculous work performed by Him who uttered it, but by the manifest detection of those thoughts and suspicions which were at the moment the immediate subjects of the unbeliever's own consciousness. Nay, he had now to discover that Jesus was not only a prophet, but much more than a prophet; that he not only had the power of detecting sin, however successfully it might be hid from human observation, but that he also exercised the prerogative of forgiving it, however flagrant, and of winning to himself the hearts of those whom he at once humbled and forgave.

But the intention and application of the parable will be better understood, if we attend to the contrast which, as already hinted, our Lord pointedly exhibited to Simon, between that individual himself and the woman with whose recent deportment, as well as previous character, he had been so much shocked and scandalized. After obtaining from Simon the admission already mentioned, he "turned to the woman, and said to Simon, Simon, seest thou this woman?" Simon had seen her ever since she entered, and had viewed her proceedings with deep though silent indignation; and far had he been from supposing that these were so soon to be convincingly exhibited in a light so disadvantageous to his own. The contrast was presented to his contemplation in three particulars. In the first place, said our Lord to him, "I entered into thine house, thou gavest me *no water* for my feet; but she hath washed my feet with *tears*, and wiped them with *the hairs of her head*." Water for the feet of guests, and especially of strangers from a journey, was, from the earliest times, one of the most common but indispensable forms in which, in eastern countries, hospitality could be shown. It was used in the days of Abraham and Lot, when they severally "entertained angels unawares." It was ordinarily applied by a servant in the family of the entertainer; and our Lord himself, when he washed the feet of his disciples, condescended to perform the work of such a servant. Cheap, common, and indispensable as such an act of hospitality was esteemed, it had been withheld by Simon from a guest whom he must have known, and should have felt to be no ordinary man. How strikingly different the respectful and affectionate proceeding of the woman, who, without having to perform the duties of an entertainer, had washed his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head!

Another point of contrast was stated by our Lord in these words—"Thou gavest me no kiss"—not even the ordinary salutation on the cheek, expressive of common courtesy; "but this woman, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my *feet*." She has shown not only courtesy, but ardent affection; she has done this, not only once,

but unceasingly, and all the while her humility has been as strikingly manifest as her affection.

But there was yet a third point of contrast. "Mine head," said Jesus, "with oil thou didst not anoint"—not with the common oil, such as that of olives, which was used on similar occasions, and which was as cheap as it was plentiful; "but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment"—precious and fragrant ointment, brought for the very purpose, and purchased (as probably was the case) out of her scanty means, or possibly with the last pittance that she could command.

After such a striking and instructive representation as was thus exhibited, well might our Lord conclude his remarks to Simon in these touching and empathic words, "Therefore I say unto thee, her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much;" this love being an evidence of her faith and repentance, and therefore of her forgiveness. It is obvious that our Lord was not assigning the *cause*, but describing the *effect* of her forgiveness. He was accounting for, and vindicating those remarkable proceedings on her part, which had given Simon so much causeless offence; and this he did, by representing them as the effect of the mercy which had been exercised towards her. It was not the greatness of her love that procured her forgiveness, but the greatness of her forgiveness, or of that mercy to which she was fondly clinging in the hope of forgiveness, that had produced such ardent and unwonted manifestations of her love. Great and manifold as were her sins, our Lord showed that they had been forgiven, by pointing to those extraordinary and yet most natural expressions of her gratitude and affection, which so plainly evinced a sense of deepest obligation, and which this was sufficient, not only to account for but to justify. This is the true history, the really scriptural view of a guilty sinner's forgiveness, and a pardoned sinner's love. Repentance is as much the gift of God through the death, righteousness, and intercession of the Redeemer, as is the remission of sins. (Acts v. 31). We are "justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus;" and then immediately it is that "We love him, because he first loved us."

The same principle, however, which served to explain and to vindicate the conduct of the woman, served also to explain the uncourteousness of Simon. Her love, ardently expressed as it was, was not *greater* than her sense of obligation; and his, scanty and cold as it was at best, was not *less* than his sense of obligation. "But to whom little is forgiven," said our Lord to him, "the same loveth little." In Simon's case, little had been forgiven, because, as he flattered himself, there had been little that *needed* to be forgiven; and his love, if he had anything deserving of the name, was so feeble as to justify the most serious

doubts whether he had really been forgiven at all. In speaking of him as one who "loved a little," our Lord may be regarded, not so much as declaring this to be the real state of the case, as reasoning with him, "according to his own thoughts of himself;" in order that he might enable him to see and induce him to acknowledge, that feelings so very different as his own and those of the woman, would necessarily lead to very different results of outward demonstration. Oh! it is a suspicious and ominous thing to have only "a *little* love to Christ;" it is a ruinous thing to be *satisfied* with having it.

It must have been a comfort to the drooping spirit of the humble penitent, to hear the Saviour state, as he appears to have done in her presence, the circumstances which we have now been considering in regard to her love to him, and the evidence it afforded of her forgiveness. Her convictions of sin, her feelings of contrition, and her consciousness of love to him who had so graciously vouchsafed to plead her cause, and silence those who showed so much harshness in judging her, were all most hopeful indications of her state; but, beyond all these, it was imparting to her soul a "peace which passeth all understanding"—it was like the coming down of rain upon mown grass, when she heard him say to Simon in her defence, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven." Yet even this was not enough. Jesus was to her a most gracious Saviour. It was like life from the dead to hear herself thus spoken of, in his conversation with another; but he would not dismiss her without a still more explicit word of comfort and of kindness *spoken to herself*. "And he said unto her," turning then from Simon, "thy sins are forgiven." But what was it with which the narrow-minded and self-righteous Pharisees would not take offence? Simon's guests were as indignant with Jesus for pronouncing her forgiveness, as both Simon and they had been with his receiving her attentions, or suffering her approach as a sinner; and they now "began to say within themselves, who is this that forgiveth sins also?" This was, indeed, a most momentous question; and, had it been seriously entertained, and thoroughly and dispassionately investigated, it must have led them to a most blessed discovery, and a most animating conviction. They might, especially after the miracle which Jesus had already performed in healing the sick of the palsy (Matt. ix. 2-8), at the sametime that he said to him, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," have come to know and rejoice "that the Son of man had power on earth to forgive sins;" and might, as well as the multitudes that beheld that miracle, have " marvelled and glorified God, who had given such power unto men."

But whatever the dissatisfaction which was felt, and whatever the murmurs which were uttered by those who were at table, our Lord, as in

the case of the paralytic already referred to, instead of replying to them, and instead of recalling or qualifying the pardon which he had pronounced, only repeated it in more emphatic terms. "And he said unto the woman, thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace." Wherever Christ is the object of a sinner's love, he must also be the object of that sinner's faith. It was this sinner's *faith in Christ* that saved her. And how did it save her? Not as an act of her soul, nor as a heavenly grace implanted in it by the Holy Spirit. It was not the ground of her salvation, but the instrument by which she accepted and appropriated the Saviour. In telling her that her *faith* had saved her, Jesus assuredly did not mean to undo her obligations to *himself*. He did not mean to say that in shedding tears, and bestowing kisses, and pouring fragrant ointment on his feet, in token of her profoundest homage, gratitude, and love to him, she had totally mistaken the real author of her deliverance, and the true foundation of her hope. No, no; but he told her in substance, what his Apostle afterwards explicitly declared, that, "being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." He commends the sinner's faith, because that faith commends Him to the sinner, and exalts him in the sinner's estimation. It is through this faith that the sinner attains to peace; and therefore, when Jesus says to the justified sinner, "Go in peace," he says in effect, at the same moment, continue in the faith. The faith which carries with it peace, is that by which we are taught and constrained to walk so as to please God. The assurance of pardon is not an encouragement to sin, but an excitement to duty. To go in peace, is to go on in the way of faith and holiness. The closing admonition which Christ here delivers, and the blessing which he here bequeaths, have both respect to a precious peace; but it is "joy and peace *in believing*"—the joy and peace connected with *living a life of faith on the Son of God*.

## LECTURE XXIII.

GOD'S EXPOSTULATION WITH JONAH.

BY THE REV. DAVID COUPER, BURNTISLAND.

JONAH IV. 5-11.

It might be inferred from the opening words of this passage, viewed in connection with the preceding context, that Jonah did not go out of Nineveh till he was given to understand that it was to be spared as a monument of the Divine forbearance, and till the Lord had rebuked him for the anger and vexation which he had in consequence displayed (ver. 1-4). The fifth verse, however, might have been somewhat differently rendered—"Now Jonah *had* gone out of the city," &c. Agreeably to this view, the following was the order of events:—The prophet having delivered his awful message, withdrew from the city before the expiry of the forty days, and stationed himself probably on some eminence whence he might have a view of the catastrophe which he confidently looked for. While there, he learned that the doom of which he had given warning was not to be inflicted. This might have been directly intimated to him by God himself, or he might have come to this conclusion on finding that no calamity had befallen Nineveh at the close of the period which had been so distinctly specified. In whatever way he arrived at a knowledge of the fact, the result was, that he was "displeased exceedingly, and very angry," probably imagining that his reputation as a prophet would be ruined. He even ventured to vindicate his former disobedience, and prayed the Lord to take away his life (ver. 2, 3). But instead of granting his rash and presumptuous request, the Lord had simply addressed to him the gentle expostulation, "Doest thou well to be angry?" (ver. 4.) This expostulation having produced no effect, another method was employed to humble him, and to bring him to a sense of his folly and perverseness—and what that method was we are informed in this passage. But before entering on this topic, we must advert to what is said regarding Jonah's departure from the city—this being the first incident presented to us in the order of the narrative.

"Jonah had gone out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and here made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city." (ver. 5.) He had two reasons, we



may presume, for going out of Nineveh. One was, that he might provide for his personal safety. He regarded Nineveh as a city that was doomed to destruction; and, believing that the destined hour of its ruin was approaching, he took care to leave it ere the forty days of respite had elapsed, that he might not himself share the awful fate of its inhabitants. Thus, long before, Lot hastened out of Sodom, that he might not perish with it. Thus, too, long afterwards, the Christians hastened out of Jerusalem, in obedience to the prophetic warning which Christ had given them, that they might escape the destruction which was impending over it (Luke xxi. 20, 21). Thus, also, God's people are called to come out of Babylon, that they receive not of her plagues (Rev. xviii. 4). The other reason why Jonah went out of Nineveh is distinctly stated in the verse before us—it was, that he might witness the execution of Jehovah's threatening, and be a spectator of the ruin which he had himself predicted. With this view he went to the east side of Nineveh, perhaps because in that quarter there was an eminence where he would be secure from danger, and from which he could survey the wide extent of the devoted city. To screen himself from the heat, which in that region is oppressive, he constructed a booth, or hut, of such materials as the place afforded; and there he sat, anxiously awaiting the fulfilment of the terrible denunciation which, in terms of the Divine command, he had delivered in the hearing of the trembling Ninevites. He had no doubt often speculated on the way in which Nineveh would be destroyed; and now as he beheld it, and watched for its destruction, one dark imagination after another would flit across his mind. He might fancy that pestilence would be sent forth as the dread minister of Jehovah's vengeance; or that, as of old in Egypt, a destroying angel would pass throughout the city, and lay low in the dust of death, not the first-born only of all the families of Nineveh, but its thousands and its tens of thousands, from the monarch down to the humblest menial—from the hoary-headed patriarch down to the unconscious babe, whose eyes had just opened on the light of day. Or, reverting to the doom of the cities of the plain, he might imagine that fire and brimstone would suddenly rush down from the darkened canopy of heaven, and convert the scene before him, now full of life and glowing with beauty and magnificence, into a scorched and blackened wilderness, overspread with the silence and overhung with the shadow of death. Or, the vision of an earthquake might be conjured up by his distempered fancy, and he might look for the hour when the proud walls and towers on which his eye now rested, should suddenly fall prostrate or sink down into the rending earth; when the solid surface should heave like the troubled sea, and fabrics that seemed destined to last for ages, should be seen like eddying waves to dash on one

another ; when the howl of despair from the perishing Ninevites should be heard rising above the crash of their falling habitations ; and when, as the result of a catastrophe so terrible, there should settle down over the brilliant and animated scene now stretching out before him, the utter stillness of universal desolation.

Whatever were the images of ruin which presented themselves to the mind of Jonah, it is certain that he looked, nay, that he longed, for the destruction of the city. What a contrast to our blessed Lord looking down upon Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives ! Nineveh had indeed been notorious for wickedness, but so also was Jerusalem ; and the guilt of the latter was fearfully aggravated by its transcendent privileges. In Nineveh, Jonah had been listened to with fear and trembling, as the messenger of heaven, and, in token of repentance, its inhabitants had put on sackcloth and observed a solemn fast, and cried mightily unto God. But in Jerusalem the Lord's prophets had been persecuted ; Christ himself had been rejected and despised ; nay, he was soon to be led through its streets as an accursed malefactor, and nailed to the cross amid the execrations of its children. Yet Jonah longs for the downfall of Nineveh, and Christ weeps at the prospect of the downfall of Jerusalem. Jonah learns that Nineveh is to be spared, and he is "displeased exceedingly, and very angry." Christ foresees the tremendous doom that is coming upon Jerusalem, and his eyes are filled with tears as he pours forth the lamentation, "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace, but now they are hid from thine eyes." O how different the mind that was in Christ, from the mind that was now in Jonah ! Well may we say, when we contemplate the holy Saviour weeping over Jerusalem, as well as when we think of the dignity of his person and the grandeur of his mission, "a greater than Jonas is here."

The prophet, as we have seen, had been filled with the deepest displeasure and vexation, on finding that God was to show mercy to Nineveh, instead of pouring out on it the vials of his wrath. Under the influence of these feelings, he had carried his complaint to God himself ; and what forbearance and condescension had he not experienced at God's hand ! The very mildness of the Divine expostulation ought to have made him ashamed of his folly and perverseness. That the high and holy One should have dealt so gently with him, as merely to say in answer to his passionate complaint, "Doest thou well to be angry ?" this surely was a consideration that should have touched his heart, and quelled the unholy passion with which it was possessed. But the reproof was disregarded, and we have now to notice the other method which God adopted in order to bring him to a better mind.

“The Lord God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief,” ver. 6. The plant here referred to, is understood to be one which is not uncommon in the East, and is still found in the region where Nineveh was situated. In height, it is said to be equal to the olive, and its leaves, which resemble those of the vine, afford a delightful shelter from the fierce heat of the sun. It is a plant of very rapid growth, and, like other plants which soon attain maturity, it speedily decays. It is manifest, however, that in the growth and decay of the particular plant here mentioned, there was something extraordinary. God designed it to serve an important purpose: it was to be the medium of conveying instruction to Jonah, and, through him, to all, who in after ages might have access to the oracles of truth; and, therefore, it was not unworthy of the Divine wisdom to cause it to spring up, and also to decay, in an extraordinary manner. The ultimate end of this intervention of Divine power, we will afterwards consider; meanwhile, we are called to observe that the immediate end for which God made the gourd spring up was, that it might overshadow Jonah, and deliver him from his grief. It was a far better shelter from the heat than the booth which he had constructed for himself. Probably it entwined itself around the booth, and threw over it a thick covering of foliage, which, by rendering it impervious to the scorching rays, produced a grateful and refreshing coolness. But how could it be said to deliver Jonah from his grief? Let it be observed, in reply to this very natural question, that the body and the mind act powerfully upon each other; that when the one is in a disordered or feverish condition, the other is easily fretted and annoyed, and is exceedingly prone to form exaggerated views, both of present and of prospective evils; and that relief from bodily suffering is therefore conducive to mental tranquillity. The prophet, we know, was greatly distressed by the violence of the heat, and, while in this condition, his mind would give way more readily to the influence of passion than in ordinary circumstances. The relief, therefore, which the grateful shadow of the plant afforded him, would naturally tend to soothe his perturbed and excited spirit; and we are told accordingly, that he “was exceeding glad of the gourd.” It relieved him from much physical suffering, and by diverting his attention from the bitter disappointment over which he had been brooding, it helped materially to tranquillize his mind. Having found an agreeable and unexpected solace, he forgot his misery for a season; and as he sat in the cool shadow of the leafy canopy which the hand of God had so benignantly stretched over him, not only did anger and vexation flee away, but gladness itself became an inmate of his bosom.

Brief, however, was its stay. A cause, apparently the most trivial, soon turned it into bitterness. "God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered," ver. 7. When Jonah first looked upon it in the morning, he saw that it had begun to droop, and still as he looked, its strength and freshness continued to decline; its leaves, so green and luxuriant when the sun went down, assumed a wan and sickly aspect, and were soon parched and shrivelled by the excessive heat; and through its lifeless branches the rays poured down with unmitigated fervour on his defenceless head. Little had he dreamed, when he lay down in the evening to slumber in its shadow, that the enjoyment which it afforded him was so soon to be extinguished! But so it is with mankind in general; they are ready to acknowledge that the joys of earth are transitory, but they are not ready to make a personal application of the solemn truth. When the plant of their prosperity is green and flourishing, they dream not that a worm is at its root; when the pillar of their confidence seems erect and firm, they think not of the flood that is undermining its foundation; when the sky is serene above them, they prepare not for the storm that is gathering in the distance. Meanwhile, as they slumber, the worm gnaws at the vitals of their comfort, and the tide of change sweeps onward irresistibly, and clouds of evil appear in the horizon, and spread throughout the sky. They have been dreaming of bliss, but they awake to darkness and to sorrow. "O ye sons of men," how long will ye love vanity?"—how long will ye trust in refuges of lies? "Arise ye, and depart, for this is not your rest." There is no safety, no peace, no satisfaction for your souls, save in the shadow of that Plant of Renown, whose leaves never wither, and whose fruit never fails.

It is often said that afflictions seldom come single, and the saying, whatever be its general truth, finds at least an illustration in the case of Jonah. The loss of his gourd was not the only thing that now afflicted him; for "it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live," ver. 8. Eastward of Nineveh lie sandy deserts, which, reflecting the heat poured down from a sky that is generally cloudless, render the atmosphere above them peculiarly sultry and oppressive. The wind that sweeps over these burning plains is much dreaded by the inhabitants of the neighbouring countries, and, according to a modern traveller, who speaks from personal observation, is "hot, stormy, and singularly relaxing and dispiriting."\* Such was the wind that now beat on the prophet's unprotected head. Instead of

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\* Rich's Narrative.

the fresh and balmy air of morning playing softly round the plant which had sprung up to shelter him, a sultry gale from the desert stripped it of its leaves, and howled dismally among its drooping branches. Thus exposed to the glare of the unclouded sun, and the enervating influence of the hot and sickly wind, he felt his very life to be a burden, and began to sigh for death, saying, in the bitterness of his heart, it is better for me to die than to live. Had his mind been rightly exercised when he enjoyed the delightful shelter which God had provided for him, how different would have been his feelings and his conduct now! But gratitude is not always the accompaniment of gladness. Jonah had been "exceeding glad of the gourd;" but it is not said that he had been exceeding grateful. Had such been his state of mind—had he looked up to God as the author of his comforts, and acknowledged his unworthiness, by unfeignedly confessing the pride and stubbornness which he had so recently displayed, might he not now have been enabled to bow with submission to God's holy will, and to say with pious resignation, "the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord?" When men set their hearts upon earthly treasures, and forget their obligations to the Giver of all good, and the dependence of their comfort on his sovereign pleasure, they are ill prepared for encountering adversity. Where is their joy when they are pierced by the rod on which they fondly leaned, or deprived of the shelter beneath which they had expected to enjoy a long repose? Unable to rejoice in the Lord, or to look up to him with confidence as the God of their salvation, they find themselves "wretched, and miserable, and poor." Their days are days of darkness, and they become weary of life without being prepared for death. Alas! how deep is the infatuation of man! With an immortal soul within him, which cannot be satisfied with any portion short of God himself, he devotes himself greedily to the pursuit of those things which, while they endure, are often felt to be vanity, and when they perish, leave nought behind but vexation of spirit. And how miserable the state of him who thus risks his happiness in a fragile bark, which the very next ripple on the tide of time may prove sufficient to destroy. Who, then, is the wise man, but he who includes eternity within the range of his calculations? And who is the happy man, but he who, having gone to his heavenly Father by the new and living way, has chosen and secured a portion that can never fail him? Let earthly supports give way, and he has still a sure foundation for his highest hopes to rest upon. Let earthly comforts be removed, and he has still an unfailling source of consolation. Let the winds of adversity beat vehemently against him, and he has still a refuge where no real evil can befall him. "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him."

“Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”

But what was the design of the peculiar trial to which Jonah was subjected? The trial was sent to convince him of his sin in wishing the destruction of Nineveh, in opposition to the will of God, and for the sake of maintaining his own credit as a prophet. He had slighted the tender exhortation which had already been addressed to him, and it was meet, therefore, that instruction should come to him in the way of chastisement. But pride perverts the understanding, and passion darkens it; and when these unhappy influences are at work, men, when visited with trouble, are slow to perceive the end for which God afflicts them. Thus it was with Jonah. Glad while his comfort lasted, he was vexed and angry when it failed him; and, instead of setting himself to consider seriously why the Lord thus dealt with him, he only fretted and murmured at what he conceived to be his unmerited affliction. It was therefore necessary that the instructive lesson which this dispensation was intended to convey, should be plainly set before him, and with this view the Lord put to him the question, “Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?” ver. 9. Does it become thee to express displeasure because the plant that sheltered thee for a day has perished? Is it meet that for a cause so trivial thy spirit should be fretted and chafed within thee? “I do well to be angry even unto death,” was the presumptuous reply of the yet rebellious prophet. It seemed as if neither the rod of affliction, nor the voice of God himself, could humble his spirit, and bring him to a sense of the error of his way. Yet the fretful and stubborn temper he displayed only served to bring out a fresh manifestation of the Divine mercy and forbearance. God bore with his repeated provocations, and condescended still further to expostulate with him, in order to convince him of his sin, and to turn him from the wayward course in which he had been wandering. But it was not for his sake only that the Divine patience was so wonderfully displayed, “Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning,” and when we read of the manner in which the Almighty dealt with his offending prophet, let us learn to bear with the infirmities of one another, and let us also be encouraged to go, as penitents, to our Father who is in heaven; for does he not here remind us, in a way the most impressive, that he is “gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness?”

Can any thing be conceived more fitted to awaken in the mind of Jonah feelings both of shame and sorrow for his sin, than the reproof

contained in the concluding verses of the passage? "Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night and perished in a night; and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left; and also much cattle?" ver. x. 11. Those "unable to discern between their right hand and their left," are evidently children of very tender age; and as their number is specified, we may form an estimate of the population of Nineveh. The class referred to is found, in most places, to be nearly equal to one-fifth of the entire population, so that Nineveh, at this period, must have contained somewhere about 600,000 inhabitants. This probably falls short of the truth; but even a number considerably larger could not be reckoned great, if the extent of the city is taken into account. It is described as "an exceeding great city of three days' journey" (iii. 3), from which it has been inferred that it was contained within a circuit of between fifty and sixty miles. Within the walls, however, there were large open spaces, fields as well as gardens; and hence it is easy to account for the circumstance of "much cattle" being in Nineveh. It was one of the most ancient seats of population, and, though long a place of no great celebrity, it was now the metropolis of the Assyrian empire, and, in point of extent, opulence, and splendour, was altogether unrivalled. Such was the city to which God showed mercy, but which Jonah desired to see utterly destroyed. The plant which had screened him from the heat of the sun, was of more importance in his eyes than Nineveh with its thousands and its tens of thousands. The loss of the gourd was very grievous to him; the destruction of the city he would have hailed with satisfaction. The gourd was not his property, but had been only lent him for a day; it had sprung up suddenly, without any labour or even forethought on his part; and, though the worm had not smitten it, and caused it to perish in a night, it would soon have withered. Yet he had sighed very bitterly over its premature decay; and should he have no pity on the mightiest and most populous city in the earth? The men and women of Nineveh had humbled themselves in sackcloth and ashes, under the mighty hand of God;—were *they* of no account in the prophet's estimation? There was, moreover, a vast number of helpless babes who had never offended the Lord by actual transgression;—was no pity due to *them*? There were also many dumb creatures—partakers of life though not of reason—all of which, had Nineveh been destroyed, would no doubt have perished in the general ruin;—was not each of *them* far more worthy of commiseration than the prophet's gourd? Yet these considerations had all been overlooked by him; and, however he might have attempted to disguise it from himself, it was mere selfishness which had made him

so insensible to the claims of mercy. He mourned the loss of the gourd, because his personal comfort was thereby affected ; he was indignant at the preservation of Nineveh, because he imagined that its ruin was essential to the maintenance of his official reputation. But was God to be straitened in the exercise of his mercy, because his prophet was displeased ? Was Nineveh, though mourning for its sins, to be destroyed without remedy by the rod of his judgments, as if the penitential tears and supplications of his creatures were of no moment in his sight ? Was he, the universal Father, to have no compassion for the tender babes who, unable to “discern between their right hand and their left,” had never, like their now trembling and sorrowing parents, offended him by deeds of infamy and violence ? Or was it unworthy of him who declares that his tender mercies are over all his works, to care for the very cattle which Nineveh contained, and suffer them to enjoy for a longer term the pleasure of existence ?

Thus God both reproved Jonah, and condescended to vindicate his own procedure. With his solemn and touching expostulation, the book abruptly closes. Jonah, it should seem, was dumb, and opened not his mouth. Let us hope that he returned to his own land, adoring both the mercy and the righteousness of God, and acknowledging, with godly sorrow, that to himself belonged shame and confusion of face. If, as is generally believed, he was himself the narrator of this portion of his history, how deep must have been the humiliation which he felt, when led thus solemnly to review his conduct, and to put it on record for warning and instruction to all future generations ! Our Lord has said, “He that exalteth himself, shall be abased” ; and, in the case of Jonah, this truth is strikingly exemplified. Pride was his besetting sin—his reputation was his idol—and yet, of all the prophets whose writings have come down to us, in a collected form, he is the one whose character is represented in the darkest colours, and who has the slenderest claims on our esteem and veneration. Let us learn, from the case of this prophet, the indispensable necessity of cultivating an humble and self-denying spirit, and of guarding with holy jealousy against all such feelings as would prompt us, on the one hand, to arraign the equity of Jehovah’s dispensations when they seem to be adverse to our personal comfort or our fancied honour ; or would prevent us, on the other, from cherishing compassion for any of our fellow-creatures, or even for the beasts that perish. Let us not forget that though we had all gifts, and all knowledge, and could speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and yet were destitute of humility and charity, we should only be as sounding brass, and as a tinkling cymbal. In vain have we pondered the lessons of this passage, if we have gained no impressions of the deep malignity of pride and selfishness, and if we are not resolved, depending on the help of the spirit of grace, to aim at



the thorough conquest of passions so offensive to God, so injurious to ourselves, and so hostile to the welfare and happiness of all to whom our influence extends.

*Finally*, Let us be encouraged, by the view here given us of the character of God, to approach him, in the exercise of faith and penitence, by the way of his appointment. That he delighteth in mercy, and is slow to anger, is manifest from his dealings with the Ninevites and with Jonah, as well as from direct and oft-repeated testimonies of his holy word. To whom, then, shall the sinner go but to the very God against whom he has rebelled?—to whom shall the backslider go, but to the very God from whom he has departed? It is God's own voice that says, "Look unto me and be saved;" and lest we should tremble at the thought of looking unto him who is infinitely glorious in holiness and justice, the gospel declares, that he is "God in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself," and it tells us that he spared not his own son, but delivered him up to death, that the guilty might have life. Wherefore, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him turn unto the Lord, for he will have mercy on him, and unto our God, for he will abundantly pardon." At the same time, let it never be forgotten, that God is holy as well as merciful, just as well as gracious. Had the Ninevites not repented, the threatening against them would have been carried into execution; and, if sinners refuse to hear the voice of God—if, because sentence against their evil works is not executed speedily, their hearts are fully set in them to do evil—let them know that the hour is coming, when God shall render unto them according to their works, and when they shall have to do, not with the offers of his mercy, but with the terrors of his wrath. The ultimate destiny of Nineveh itself may well impress this solemn truth upon our hearts. We learn from history, that Nineveh relapsed into its evil courses, and that about a century and a-half after the visit of the prophet, having filled up the measure of its iniquity, it was taken by the hosts of Media, and utterly destroyed. Every vestige of its glory has long since vanished from the earth: the enquiring traveller was long unable even to discover where it stood. The shadow of Divine wrath seems still to rest on the few shapeless and melancholy mounds which alone remain to tell of its existence; and its fate holds out to individuals, and to nations, a salutary warning against despising the goodness and forbearance of Jehovah—against being swift to sin, because he is slow to punish.

## LECTURE XXIV.

BY THE REV. MACADAM GRIGOR, KETTLE AND CULTS.

EPHESIANS ii. 1-7.

THE people of Ephesus were deeply sunk in idolatry and wickedness, before the light of the glorious gospel had reached their dark city. There stood the magnificent temple of Diana, to whose worship the inhabitants were madly devoted. But what is too hard for God, in the accomplishment of his purpose of grace ! He bound the strong man in that citadel of his power, and spoiled his goods. We have a very interesting account of the conversion of the Ephesians, in the 18th and 19th chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. It was through Paul's ministry, continued amongst them for the space of three years, that the blessed change was wrought, "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." The gospel encountered in Ephesus much opposition ; but, by the power of God, who had rich mercy in store for the poor idolaters, it greatly triumphed." "The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever sure ; and he will do all his pleasure." It is with no common feelings that a Christian contemplates the triumphs of the gospel, on whatever field they are won ; but, O ! how refreshing to his soul, when he learns of the victories of the truth, where Satan has his seat ! when he hears of the devil's strongholds pulled down, and those who were long led captive at his will, called into the glorious liberty of the sons of God ! It is when we think of the conversion of Ephesus, and Rome, and Corinth, that our spirits are stirred within us to exclaim, How rich, sovereign, omnipotent, is the grace of God !

It was while a prisoner at Rome, for the testimony of Jesus, that Paul addressed this sublime epistle to the Christians of Ephesus. His object was to strengthen their minds in the faith of the gospel, by imparting higher views of the love of God, and the glory of Jesus. It was about thirty years later, that another epistle was sent to Ephesus, which we have recorded in the book of Revelation. Alas ! it was because that church, once so faithful and true, had left its first love ! In the verses now read as the subject of lecture, the apostle reminds the Ephesians of the wretched condition in which they had once been, and the blessed

change which had taken place in their state and character, through Divine grace, and concludes with announcing the end, or ultimate object of God's kindness toward them, and all who had been made partakers of the common salvation, namely, that he might display, for the encouragement of sinners, in all future ages, "the exceeding riches of his grace."

I. In the first three verses, the state and character of the Ephesians before their conversion is described. As to their state, they "were dead in trespasses and sins." This death may be viewed as twofold, namely, legal and spiritual. The former consisted in the condemning sentence of the Divine law, under which they lay, as its transgressors; the latter consisted in the moral pollution of their natures, in consequence of which, they were utterly incapable of any holy obedience to God. The connection betwixt these is most intimate, and should be carefully weighed. Moral pollution is the effect of guilt; so that, until the curse of a broken law is cancelled, the soul has no power, no desire to serve God. Just as the manacled slave cannot use his limbs till his chains are loosed—as the criminal cannot leave his dark and unwholesome dungeon, till the sentence which condemned him to the ignominious cell has been remitted—so the poor sinner, over whose soul the condemnation of the law hangs with blighting influence, has no liberty to love or serve God, till the sentence be cancelled, and the joyful announcement break in upon his soul, "Be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee." "But now," says the Apostle, "being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life."

As to their character, or external deportment, the Ephesians are described in verses second and third, "They walked in sins." The term "walk" is expressive of a regular habitual course. Their whole life was sin. It is by the habitual tenor of men's lives, that their religious state is to be determined. It is not his creed, or his profession, but a man's walk, which is the true evidence of a heart right or wrong with God. The tenor of a believer's life, though not free from daily infirmities, and occasional dark stains, alike hurtful to his own peace, and dishonouring to God, is holy and spiritual. He "walks" not after the flesh, but after the spirit, because in Christ Jesus, the fountain of holiness. The tenor of an unregenerate man's life, on the other hand, is sinful and worldly, although he may perform many acts materially good. His worldly occupation, in itself lawful, to him is sin—"the plowing of the wicked is sin." Religious duties, most obligatory on all, to him are sin; "the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord." He "walks after the flesh," and the reason lies herein—he is out of Christ.

The sinful life which the Ephesians led, was more particularly distinguished by conformity to the world, and compliance with the devil. They walked in sins, "according to the course of this world," "according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." By the "world" here, we are to understand the wicked and ungodly portion of men. "And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness." The sentiments, tastes, and habits, of the world, which run so counter to the principles and precepts of the gospel of Jesus, constitute its "course." For its enmity to Jesus, the world is particularly distinguished. "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you," so that conformity to the world is reckoned a conclusive proof of enmity to God. "Know ye not, that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God." How clear, how strong, is the language of the Spirit! Many act under the delusion that they may be the friends of both. "But ye cannot serve God and Mammon." It is just as possible for a man to go in opposite directions at one and the same time, as it is for him to please God, and "walk according to the course of this world." O! how deeply shall we mourn over such as sacrifice the friendship of God on the altar of the world, and know that they make it!

Further, The Ephesians walked in sins, "according to the prince of the power of the air." By this prince is meant the devil, who receives this title because of the mighty power he exercises. The subject of his dominion are styled "the power of the air," by which is meant the large company of apostate spirits, who are united under Satan as their head, called elsewhere, "the powers of darkness." The seat of Satan's dominion is the "air," where he and his emissaries continually rove about intent on the ruin of man, and the dishonour of God. Hence Satan is called the "god of this world." It is fearful to think that the great adversary possesses such dominion; and that, in the case of so many, he finds it so easily wielded. But God's people have strong consolation under the thought, though against them Satan's darts are specially directed. His power is not absolute, but permissive. He is under the control of that Almighty conqueror who "spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly," and now sits on the throne of the universe, "head over all things"—over devils, as well as over men—"to the church."

Now, it is affirmed of Satan, that "he now worketh in the children of disobedience." His empire is not situated in a far-off region, whence he could exert no influence on man; but it is very near, even in the souls of the disobedient. The children of disobedience are such as

reject alike the authority of the law and the love of the gospel, "walking in the ways of their hearts, and in the sight of their eyes." "Our lips are our own; who is lord over us?" In these Satan works. He works, not directly—for direct and immediate influence on the soul is the prerogative of the Spirit of God—but indirectly, by their evil passions and propensities, which are so much fuel, that he easily kindles into a flame. And he "now" worketh in the children of disobedience. His influence was not confined to the dark ages—"the times of ignorance which God winked at"—but now, amid the light and liberty of the gospel dispensation, he retains his malignant dominion. Unregenerate men are hard of believing that they are actuated by such evil influence; but how manifest is it from Scripture, that they are in bondage to the wicked one? Can any testimony be clearer than what is supplied by such passages as these, in addition to our text—"Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do." (John viii. 44.) "And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will." (2 Tim. ii. 26.) "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." And it is only by the fact of an agency mightier in evil than human, that we can account for the awful length to which the wicked are often carried in their contempt of God, and the sacred realities of eternity. What bitter enmity to Christ and his holy cause—what awful crimes—how deep apathy to the soul's well-being—what reckless lives—how impenitent death-beds have many sinners exhibited, for which human depravity alone cannot account? but which force the truth of the text on every serious mind, that the "prince of the power of the air now worketh in the children of disobedience." And this truth—sober, Bible truth, and no devout imagination, at which the world may safely scoff, we would seek to impress on all the children of disobedience, within reach of our feeble expostulation. Whether ye live regardless of the Divine law, or neglecters of the great salvation—whether ye be open transgressors, glorying in your shame, or decent unbelievers in the grace of God, we earnestly call on you to believe that you are influenced by the devil. He carries you on in the path of iniquity, by the first fatal lie—"Ye shall not surely die." You believe, alas! the tempter, and against every entreaty, ye go forward. When the light of the glorious gospel shines brightly around you, and it seems about to penetrate the dark recesses of your hearts, this god of the world blinds your minds, lest that light should enter, and the hour of your happy freedom come. Too long has he thus enthralled you in sin; too long blinded you to heaven's truth, and shut your hearts against a Saviour's love that seeks to embrace you within its ample folds, that ye may not perish in the wiles of your im-

placable adversary. O! that you would now listen to the voice of the best friend poor sinners have, sweetly inviting you to his service; a blessed freedom and royal indemnity would be yours. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

In the third verse, the apostle extends the description given of the Ephesians, to another party far more favoured than they, with respect to religious privileges, namely, himself and his Jewish countrymen. "Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lust of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." As to character, both parties had been alike carnal and corrupt, "fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind." As to state, both had been in the same condemnation, "and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." And Jews and Gentiles were subject to wrath "by nature." They entered the world under the curse of God, because the children of guilty Adam, in whom they had sinned, and with whom they had fallen. Man does not become a child of wrath, simply in consequence of personal, actual transgression, as some falsely assert. He is a child of wrath by *nature*. Though he should only live to open his eyes on the world, and then pass into eternity, he has done enough in the sight of God, to render it an eternity of woe. "Behold," says the devout Psalmist, "I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." What language could more expressly convey the doctrine of original guilt than this? The apostle follows in this passage, more briefly, the method which he adopts in his grand epistle to the Romans—he carries home conviction of sin, first to the Gentiles, and then to the Jews—and thus prepares both parties for that rich display of Divine grace which the gospel supplies, in justifying freely the sinner that believeth in Jesus.

II. We come, secondly, to consider the great change which had taken place in the wretched condition of the Ephesians through Divine grace.

This blessed change is explained in verses 1, 4, 5, and 6. In verse 1st, we are informed in what the change consisted. "You hath he quickened." To quicken is to implant holy principles in the soul, so that it becomes alive to God and righteousness. It is such a work upon the soul, as that which was wrought on the body of Lazarus when he revived from the dead, to the enjoyments and activities of life. This quickening is the first work of Divine grace accomplished in man. It consists of a holy illumination sent into the soul by the Spirit, by which

the dark understanding is enlightened to perceive the evil of sin, and the glory of the Redeemer, and the will is renewed to acquiesce in the gospel salvation and close with Christ. Then "all old things pass away, and behold all things become new." Blessed change! As the first streaks of morning light to the tempest-beaten mariner, revealing a calmer sea and a fairer sky—as the first ray of sunshine on the eyeballs of the blind—as the first breath of heaven's pure atmosphere to the lungs of the emancipated prisoner—as the first motion of health through the feverish frame—so to the poor sinner is the blest hour when God first manifests himself to his soul, and heaven's holiness and love are made to tabernacle there.

We have next the author of this gracious change, in verses 4 and 5. "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ; (by grace ye are saved)." To quicken dead souls is a Divine work, as much so as is the resuscitation of a dead body to life. The new birth is as far above the effort of nature, as the rearing of a world. By nature we are dead in trespasses and sins: there is, therefore, no power either to will or to do, to desire life or to produce it, left to man. It is when the Spirit, who breathes where he listeth, bloweth on the "slain," that they live. Regeneration must be traced up to the great God as its great efficient cause. "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." "Not unto us, O Lord, but unto thy name give glory."

We have next the formal or meritorious cause of this change. "He hath quickened us together with Christ," ver. 4. Christ was quickened by the mighty power of God when he rose from the dead; and his resurrection was the Father's testimony to the perfection and acceptance of that glorious work, which is the foundation of all the grace which flows from heaven to poor sinners. But the blessed Saviour rose not as a private, but as a public person—as the head of the chosen seed, whom his blood redeemed, so that they were quickened together with him. And while, federally, they rose with him in his resurrection, they are actually made to know the powers of his resurrection in their regeneration. In Christ's resurrection lies the principle of the new birth; it has efficacy when applied by the Spirit to quicken the soul dead in trespasses and sins.

"And hath made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Jesus not only rose from the dead, to which his people are conformed in regeneration, but also ascended into heaven, and, "sat down at the right hand of the throne of God;" and this he did as the head, so that in him his people sat down in heavenly places; and his exaltation there is the assurance

that they shall personally appear in heaven, and share in the glory the Father hath bestowed on him. "I go to prepare a place for you, and I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." And this conformity, present and future, is the result of union to Jesus—"in Christ Jesus." He and his people were from eternity constituted one mystical person. Hence their actual union in time effected, first, on His part, by His quickening Spirit, and then, on their part, by faith, in consequence of which union, they come into possession of all His saving benefits. Then are we truly saved when thus united to the Prince of life—a union as real as that which subsists between the body and the head in our corporeal frame. Little will speculative knowledge, or ordinances, or sacraments, avail a man; everything that comes short of spiritual contact with Jesus himself, comes short of salvation. However genial the sun's rays—however copious the showers of heaven, the branch which is severed from the parent stock lies withered still; so, apart from Jesus, there is power in nothing to communicate life to dead souls.

We have, finally, the moving cause of the grace shewn to the Ephesians, in verse 4, "But God, who is rich in mercy," &c. The cause of the grace manifested to Jews and Gentiles, lay in God alone, not in any measure in them. It was love residing in the bosom of the Eternal himself, which moved him to quicken these wretched sinners. Love is that sweet attribute in the Divine Being which moves him to will the happiness of his creatures. Mercy, again, is the effect of that love manifested in the deliverance from ruin of guilty and miserable creatures. The former respects God's creatures as such; the latter respects them as guilty, helpless, and perishing creatures. But it was no common love or mercy of which these poor sinners were the objects, it was "rich mercy" and "great love." How do they appear so? They were eternal—they were covenant mercy and love, flowing through Jesus, the only begotten and well-beloved of the Father. And, then, think of the objects of God's mercy and love—idolatrous Gentiles and apostate Jews—ill-deserving, hell-deserving sinners. "Even when we were dead in sins," verse 5, when alike unable to help ourselves, and unworthy of any other help—even when dead to God, to holiness, to shame—even then God quickened us together with Christ. How clearly does this establish the parenthetical declaration of the apostle in the same verse, "by grace are ye saved."

III. We come, thirdly and lastly, to the ultimate object of God's grace to sinners of the Jews and Gentiles. It is mentioned in the 7th verse, "that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of



his grace, in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." This was a noble end, in all respects worthy of our gracious God. These poor idolaters, quickened to a heavenly and endless life, are patterns of Divine grace to every age, and to every sinner of every age, till time has run its course. These are living epistles, by which God informs us of his exceeding grace. Paul speaks particularly elsewhere of his conversion: "Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first, Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to everlasting life." When God, out of sovereign grace, saves one great sinner, it is for the encouragement of other great sinners. The prohibition is no longer laid on the recipients of Divine mercy, "See you tell no man:" but every sinner saved, and the greater the sinner the better, is designed by the hand that has rescued him from destruction, for a monument, bearing the bright inscription, "The exceeding riches of God's grace," that all needing mercy may know where to find it, and how freely and largely it may be found. What stronger proof could we have that "God will have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth?" O, wretched prodigals, who have not yet tasted the love of God, why are ye outcasts from grace, which condescended to pity and save the mad votaries of Diana? O, has the thought never come across you amid the wretchedness and beggary of your outcast condition, "How many hired servants of our Father's have bread enough, and to spare, and we perish with hunger?" Arise, we beseech you, and go to your Father; he is even now on the road expecting your return, and all his bowels move in tenderness toward you.

"Through Christ Jesus," all saving blessings flow to sinners through this blessed channel. We can receive nothing from God directly, for we have offended him by our sins, and forfeited all right to that immediate access and communion which constituted the high privilege of primeval innocence and purity. Jesus is the "one Mediator between God and man." In him they meet, and are reconciled. "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me."

We have thus attempted to expound this passage of Scripture, as it bears on the wretched state of the Ephesians by nature—the happy change which had been effected through Divine grace—and the ultimate object of God's kindness toward them through Christ Jesus.

Let me shortly improve this subject, by urging on you the lessons it inculcates. Learn, *first*, from this subject, the guilt and wretchedness of our spiritual condition by nature.

We are dead in trespasses and sins. We walk in sins—we are conformed to this world. We are children of disobedience, children of wrath, children of the devil. No state on this side the grave so awful—no character so degraded as the state and character of us all by nature. Whatever differences there may be amongst us in other respects, viewed in a religious aspect we are all on a level—“for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” However the history of man may have changed, and the improvement of the species advanced since the apostle wrote the words of our text, they describe as faithfully as ever our natural state in relation to God and the things of eternity; and as the fact of our total corruption occupies a most important position in the scheme of Divine truth—as the gospel of the grace of God proceeds on it so as to be felt glad tidings only by such as believe it—this truth must be pressed on the consciences of men with all earnestness and faithfulness, that it may, by the Spirit of God, become matter of personal conviction, preparing the soul for the reception of the free salvation God hath provided. Are any of you, my beloved friends, still in this fearful condition of spiritual death? separated from the fountain of life and blessedness—strangers to holiness, because strangers to Christ—without hope, because without God. O we would seek, from love to your souls to awaken you to a sense of your state and its danger! Words cannot adequately express, far less exaggerate, the jeopardy in which you stand every moment of your brief and precarious life. Is natural death terrible? Do you shrink from it as some fearful violence done to your nature? It is but the separation of the soul from the body, which terminates neither being nor blessedness. But in spiritual death, O sinner, thou art cut off from God, and consequently without any blessedness, and without any being, as to the highest and purest exercise of man’s immortal nature. Are you members of the visible church? Do you maintain a credible profession, and a fair character, in the eye of the world? Alas! that does not make your case less to be pitied, for it really enhances your guilt and danger. You are hypocrites—“I know thy works, that thou hast a name, that thou livest and art dead.” Many go down with a lie in their right hand to the grave, and are only awakened when too late for repentance. My dear friends, a change, very great and divine, must be wrought in you. You must be quickened, you must be converted; and every moment’s delay to have it accomplished, makes your guilt deeper, and your danger more imminent, and your case more hopeless. O how long are you to sleep? Hear ye not the raging of the storm that betokens instant destruction—“What meanest thou, O sleeper, arise and call on thy God; awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give thee light.”

We learn, secondly, from this subject, how great is the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

He quickens those that are dead, and deserve to be left dead, in trespasses and sins. He delivers them from wrath—he saves them from a sinful, carnal life—he ransoms them from the power of the devil, and exalts them to the heirship of his heavenly kingdom. God, the eternal One, self-existent, independent of all creatures, does all this for sinners that deserve, through eternal ages, to lie under his infinite wrath. It is done by Him alone, and not by human power; and it is no influence from without, but his own love that moves him to confer mercy, which makes it all the richer—"By grace are ye saved." Dear children of God, partakers of the heavenly calling, is it not marvellous what Jehovah has done for you? In the hours of sweet and solitary meditation, does not the thought of it well nigh overwhelm your ravished souls? You were in God's thoughts from eternity—from eternity he was pitying, loving you; and, in the fulness of time, he quickened you to a new and heavenly, and endless life. He has united you to his well-beloved Son Jesus; and in him has not only freed you from wrath, but has made you to sit down in heavenly places. Jesus has prepared a place for you near himself; he keeps it for you and you for it; and you will soon and certainly be admitted into its glorious blessedness. O what a devoted, holy life should you live, when you think what things God hath wrought for you. How joyful should you be, when you have such present holy communion, and such future glory secured! How full of praise, when you have such a theme for your song—"the exceeding grace of God."

But it is not to you alone, dear brethren, that we would speak of Divine grace. There are poor sinners who have never tasted of this grace, who must be told how rich and free it is. There are strangers and aliens who must be pressed into the commonwealth of Israel by the argument of God's rich mercy and great love. O my friends, why stand ye aloof from the God of grace, who changed the idolaters of Ephesus into heirs of heaven? Why stand you in proud defiance, or sullen suspicion and indifference, as if God had no grace for you, but were already scowling on you from a throne of judgment? Are you ignorant that He sits on a throne of grace? Know now, then, as unspeakable encouragement, that to the "Lord your God belongeth mercy, and forgiveness, though ye have rebelled against him," and acquaint yourselves with God, and be at peace. Are you deeply affected with a sense of your own unworthiness? we entreat you to remember that it is by *grace* you are to be saved; and grace has respect not to worthiness, but to unworthiness. It is on the unworthy it fastens as its only suitable and legitimate objects—the only objects it can do aught for, or be glorified in.

Are you great sinners ? all the more welcome, dear souls, as all the more needy. Think how careful God has been to assure you of this, in the exhibition he has made of the Ephesians as a monument to all ages of the "exceeding riches of his grace." Believe it, that God holds out the golden sceptre of peace for you to touch. Believe it, that He would glorify himself in you as in Manasseh, in Mary Magdalene, in Saul of Tarsus, and in the many thousands who are now singing the song of Moses and of the Lamb in the sanctuary above. Believe it, that the day of grace is not yet passed—the door of hope not yet shut—the voice of Divine love not yet silent in its pleadings. Believe it, that your case is not yet desperate, unless you are resolved on perishing as the happier doom ; for not only have you to do with a God of mercy and love, but of rich mercy and great love, and of exceeding rich grace—so that the deepest guilt that ever loaded a human soul cannot damn you, if you would be saved from it. Time would fail me, sweet though the employment were, to tell you of the many guilty ones who found mercy at the feet of Christ. Could you tell of one who lay there unpitied, rejected, unnoticed, we should cease to plead with you. But history has recorded no such case ; and the word of Him who never lieth, has assured us it never will. O come, then, poor sinner, and know that where sin abounds grace will much more abound. Amen.

## LECTURE XXV.

CONVERSION OF PAUL.

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ACTS IX. 1-9.

It has been said, and the remark, we believe, is generally admitted to be true, that “ next to the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Paul is the most extraordinary person, whose name is handed down to us” in the annals of the Christian Church; that his conversion is a very remarkable event in the history of redemption; and that, while his labours, dangers, sufferings, and success were unquestionably greater and more abundant than those of any other of the Lord’s apostles, the accession of such an auxiliary may be justly regarded—not merely as one of the leading secondary evidences of the truth, but also as one of the most powerful secondary causes of the rapid propagation of the gospel.

It would not be easy, perhaps, to name another individual of whom, from his known character and dispositions, it could be more confidently predicted that, though all other men should believe in the name of Jesus, yet so would not he; and it would be just as difficult to point out any other, of whom, from his early education, habits, and prospects in life, it could be more positively asserted that, though all other men should become zealous supporters, he never could be any thing else than a furious persecutor of the followers of Christ. He tells us himself, that, by extraction, he was a Jew, both on the father’s and on the mother’s side—an Hebrew of the Hebrews; born in Tarsus, a free city of Cilicia; brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, a celebrated teacher in Jerusalem; taught according to the most perfect manner of the law of the fathers; and held in high estimation among his own countrymen for the zeal, precision, and ability, as well as uncompromising resolution with which he adhered to the rules, ordinances, and doctrines of the most rigid sect of the Pharisees.

He tells us that he verily thought within himself that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth, and that he per-

secuted *this way* unto the death, binding and delivering into prison both men and women. He tells us that many of the saints did he shut up in prison, and that, when they were put to death, he gave his voice against them. He tells us that he punished them oft in every synagogue, and *compelled* them to blaspheme that worthy name by which they were called. And he tells us also that he was so exceedingly mad against them, that he persecuted them even to strange cities. He tells us all this, and much more, with the deepest contrition and self-loathing abasement; and we have evidence enough to prove that the picture is not, by any means, an overcharged one. For we find, from the preceding narrative, that, when the holy martyr Stephen was sealing with his blood the truth of that testimony, which he was honoured to hold, Saul was consenting unto his death. We find also that he was not merely consenting to, but that he was also present at, this mournful tragedy; and that the witnesses, or foremost of the murderers, laid down their clothes at a young man's feet whose name was Saul. We find farther that, at that time, there was not merely a great persecution of the Church at Jerusalem, but that "as for Saul, he made havoc of the Church, entering into every house, and haling men and women, committed them to prison." "And," in the strong and striking language of the passage before us, the sacred historian goes on to say that Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that, if he found any of *this way*, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem." (Ver. 1st and 2d.)

The expression, "this way," "if he found any of this way," which occurs here and elsewhere to describe the disciples of the Lord, should have been translated, "the way," and must doubtless admit of some characteristic explanation. If it was coined by their enemies, it must, in that case, have been a term of reproach, intended to represent the followers of Jesus as being a separate faction or party by themselves. But if, as is more likely, the name was taken by themselves, and applied to them also by their enemies, then it will, in this case, in all probability, have been intended to set them forth as walking in the footsteps of him who declares himself to be "The way, and the truth, and the life." But, be this as it may, the fact is exceedingly manifest, that their pilgrimage through life was very much like that of their Master; and that the treatment which they met with was very similar to that which he received at the hands of sinful men. He was "despised and rejected of men—a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;" and so were they, for they were counted as the offscouring of all things for his sake. He was persecuted and abused, and ignominiously condemned, and cut off from

the land of the living; and so were they, for they were cast out of the synagogues, and the time came, as the Lord had told them, when every one that killed them was thinking he was doing God a service. And he was "oppressed and afflicted, and led like a lamb to the slaughter;" and so were they, for they were greatly troubled by their enemies in general, and by the persecuting Saul in particular, who, notwithstanding all that he had already done, was "still breathing out threatenings and slaughter against them." pursuing them with a savage ferocity, and panting for their death. They were like a scattered flock without a shepherd, and he was like a beast of prey ready to devour them—they were like defenceless sheep, and he like a raging wolf seeking to destroy them; and they were like lambs led to the slaughter, and he like a roaring lion thirsting for their blood. And, when he had obtained letters from the Jewish authorities, that "if he found any of *this way*, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem," he doubtless thought that then, at least, he had them fully in his own power.

It is not very easy to say with certainty, what amount of power the Jewish Sanhedrim possessed, or were permitted to exercise over their own criminals. It is certain they had an *ecclesiastical* authority over Jewish synagogues in other countries. And it is exceedingly likely that they were permitted by the Roman power, not merely to try and pass sentence upon those of their own people who had violated their own statutes, but also to carry that sentence into execution according to the law of Moses. On this ground they appear to have tried, condemned, and stoned Stephen, inflicting that punishment upon him which their own law denounced against blasphemers. On this ground Saul seems to have persecuted the Church unto the death, by authority of the Jewish rulers. And on this ground, at an after period, when Lysias, the chief captain, rescued Paul himself from the hands of the Jews who sought to kill him, he did this, not because they had no authority to inflict such a punishment, but expressly because Paul was a Roman citizen.

To all this it may be objected, how then could the Jews themselves have said to Pilate that it was not *lawful* for them to put *any* man to death? And to this it may be answered, in the first place, that their meaning may have been, that it was not lawful for them to put any man to death whom they had accused before Pilate, and charged, not with crimes against their own law, but with sedition, and aspiring to a kingdom in prejudice of Cæsar; in the second place, that such cases did not really fall under their tolerated jurisdiction, but under that of Pilate himself; and, in the third place, that "crucifixion" was a Roman and not a Jewish punishment at all.

It is true, they said, "We have a law, and by our law he ought to die," (to be *stoned* to death) "because he made himself the Son of God." But then they did not wish him to be *stoned* to death; they wanted a more ignominious doom for him; they desired that he should be crucified; and, as they could not do this consistently with their own law, they called upon Pilate to do it for them. And, if the objection should still be started, how then could Pilate have said to the Jews, "Take ye him and *crucify* him, for I find no fault in him," the answer to this may be, not that Pilate was thereby giving them any authority to crucify the Son of God, but that he was challenging them to do it, after he had pronounced him innocent.

It must be admitted, however, that the point is not altogether free of difficulty; and that it may be necessary, after all, to suppose that the Jews could not *legally* put any man to death, in any circumstances, without having first obtained the sanction of the Roman president. But, whatever opinion may be formed about the legality of this exercise of power on the part of the Jewish authorities, there can be little doubt that it *was* exercised, that the followers of Christ were persecuted unto the death, and that Saul appears to have entered upon a war of extermination against them. And here we cannot help remarking how unexpectedly the Lord will sometimes interfere for the deliverance of his own people, and how remarkably he illustrates the Psalmist's declaration, that "the wrath of man will praise him, and that he will restrain the remainder of his wrath." The saints at Damascus were fully apprised of the coming and intentions of Saul; they saw that in all human probability they would be left entirely at his mercy; they felt that they were shut in on every side; and they doubtless gave themselves to prayer for deliverance. But it is exceedingly unlikely that any one of them had ever dreamed of the manner in which that deliverance at length arrived. But the thoughts of the Lord are not like man's thoughts, neither are his ways like man's ways; and it very often happens that his deliverance is not only different from what was looked for, but that it is nearest at the very time when his people think their own circumstances to be the most desperate. It has been finely said that "man's extremity is God's opportunity;" and, while this was certainly the case in the present instance, the result could not have been more unexpected to the *persecuted* than it must have been to the *persecutor* himself—for we are told, at the third verse, that "as he journeyed, he came near Damascus; and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: and he fell on the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I



am Jesus whom thou persecutest. It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he, trembling and astonished, said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do." (Ver. 3-6.)

It is worthy of remark, that, though in this passage it is merely said that "suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven," it is expressly stated in the 17th verse, and in the parallel passage in chapter xxii., that the Lord Jesus Christ himself appeared unto him, that he saw that Just One, and that he heard the voice of his mouth; and we will not attempt to describe his state of mind when he fell on the earth, and heard the voice saying unto him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" It is very probable that that state of mind was such that neither he himself nor any other man could well describe it: and it is also very likely that, when he put his first question, "Who art thou, Lord?" he might have been so sore amazed that he did not know very well what he said. But we may state, that in chapter xxii. the answer to this question is said to have been, "I am Jesus of Nazareth;" or, as it should have been rendered, "I am Jesus, *the Nazarene*, whom thou persecutest." And there are a few things connected with this circumstance to which we would solicit your attention.

(1.) In the first place, observe that there were three different names, or appellatives, by which both Jews and Gentiles were accustomed to express their contempt of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was sometimes contemptuously called, "The Galilean;" at other times, "The Crucified One;" and, at other times, "The Nazarene." These names were very current among the enemies of Christianity in New Testament times. They were intended to convey the utmost scorn and contempt on the part of those that employed them; and, beyond all question, they must have been often used and applied by Saul, in his frantic zeal against the church of Christ.

(2.) In the second place, observe that unutterable tenderness, and sympathy, and loving-kindness, which are implied in the manner in which the Son of God here identifies himself with his own persecuted, and despised, and suffering people—"Why persecutest thou me?" and "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest."

He prayed for his disciples when he was about to leave them, that they might be one with him, as he was one with the Father; and now that he is glorified, he accounts them one with himself. He regards all the kindnesses that are done unto them as being done unto him, and all the injuries as being done unto him that are done unto them. He charges Saul with persecuting him when he persecuted them; and we can be at no loss here to discern the doctrine which he elsewhere informs us

that he will maintain at the final judgment. "Inasmuch as ye have done unto the least of these my servants, ye have done it unto me;" and "inasmuch as ye have not done this unto the least of these my servants, ye have not done it unto me." And

(3.) In the third place, observe the pointed appeal which is here made to the persecutor himself—"Saul, Saul, why persecutest *thou* me?" Just as if he had said, What have I done to merit this at thy hands? What have my people done to deserve such treatment? What makes my cause so odious in thy sight? And there is something unutterably touching in the very reduplication of the persecutor's name—Saul, Saul, why shouldst *thou* have done all this? *Thou*, who knowest the law and the prophets, and the psalms; *thou*, who *shouldst* have known that all these things must have been fulfilled, which you are now resisting; and *thou*, who shouldst have believed that the Son of Man ought to suffer many things, and to enter into his kingdom. And, keeping all this in view, it is not easy to conceive a more overcoming appeal than that which is made in the passage before us. "Who art thou, Lord?" said the bewildered persecutor. "And the Lord said, I AM JESUS, THE NAZARENE—the *rejected*, the *despised*, the *derided*, the *condemned*, the CRUCIFIED NAZARENE, *whom thou persecutest*." "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." It is hard for thee to rush upon the bosses of Jehovah's shield; it is hard for thee to fight against Omnipotence; it is hard for thee to contend with God, for thou shalt not prosper; and it is hard for thee to seek the injury of my people, for thou wilt thereby merely injure thyself, because I am with them, and they shall be mine in that day when I make up my jewels, and I will spare them as a man spareth his son that serveth him; and he that toucheth them shall touch the apple of his eye."

We have thus endeavoured to direct your attention to Saul the persecutor—Saul making havoc of the Church—Saul breathing out threatenings and slaughter against them—Saul pursuing them to the death—and Saul persecuting them even to strange cities. But look at him *now*—he is low in the dust of self-abasement—his proud spirit humbled—his haughty soul subdued—his frantic rage extinguished, and his enemy slain. Look at him now—trembling and astonished—astonished at himself—at his own blindness, and guiltiness, and madness, and cruelty—astonished at the long-suffering patience that bore with such a blood-thirsty persecutor—and astonished at the marvellous goodness and mercy that condescended to expostulate with him, notwithstanding all that he had done. Astonished, but trembling also at the same time—trembling, because he knew that he was in the presence of the Holy One of Israel—trembling, because he felt that he was condemned of

his own conscience, as well as charged with persecuting the Son of God—and trembling, because he was afraid lest there should be no forgiveness for one like him. And look at him again, notwithstanding all his doubts and fears, and terrible perplexities—he is laying himself low at the foot of the cross—he is casting himself entirely upon the wisdom and will of his heavenly Father. He is willing to be disposed of in any way that he may be pleased to dispose of him; and he is asking, with all the simplicity of a little child, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do.”

In reply to this inquiry, the Lord did not give him a full answer at first. He said unto him, “Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be there told thee what thou must do.” And while we can trace in this general declaration a resemblance to that which was made to Abraham to try his faith, “Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land which I will show thee,” we find also that a promise was given to Saul, as well as to Abraham, to comfort and support him, inasmuch as we are told in the parallel passage, in the xxvi. chapter, that the Lord expressly assured him, “I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness, both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people and from the Gentiles, unto whom I now send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.”

In the 7th verse, we are informed that “the men which journeyed with Saul *stood speechless* ;” whereas it is said in chapter xxvi. that, at the first, they *fell to the ground* as well as he; so that they must have recovered themselves and risen up, when they *stood speechless* with wonder and astonishment. And we are here also told, not only that they *stood speechless*, but that they did so, “*hearing a voice, but seeing no man* ;” whereas it is said in the xxii. chapter, that “they saw indeed the light, and were afraid, but that they *heard not the voice of him that spake to Saul*.” And in order to reconcile these two apparently contradictory declarations, we have merely to remark, that the meaning is, that they did indeed *hear a voice*, but that they did not hear it so distinctly as to understand what was said. They heard a sound, but they did not comprehend its import; and while they saw the light, they did not see Him who was made manifest to Saul in the light, nor did they know that this was the Son of God. We are not informed whether these attendants of Saul were ever brought to the knowledge of the truth or not, though, from the silence of the sacred historian concerning them,

there is reason to fear that they were still left in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity; but their master was not disobedient to the heavenly vision; for we find from the 8th and 9th verses, that "Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man; but they led him by the hand, and brought him unto Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink."

Here the obedience of faith was strikingly exhibited. The Lord commanded, "Arise and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do." "And he arose from the earth," and obeyed, asking no questions, starting no objections, and pleading no difficulties. He never shrunk from facing the ridicule to which he must have known that he would certainly be subjected at the instance of his old associates. He never feared to meet the dangers to which he would doubtless be exposed at the hands of the scribes and Pharisees. He never thought of craving any delay till he should be fully recovered; and he never dreamed of excusing himself on the score of his present blindness, from undertaking what was so manifestly hazardous. But, though he found that he could see no man when he attempted to open his eyes; though he was unable to find the way for himself; and though it was necessary that he should be led by the hand, in order that he might reach Damascus, still he instantly made the attempt, in obedience to the instructions, and in dependence upon the gracious promise of him who had so directed him. And, while the very circumstance of his being blind was a patent proof, both to himself and to others, that the vision had been no vain imagination, but a great reality, it afforded him an opportunity at the same time of demonstrating, even by his very helplessness, how entirely he could cast himself upon the care of him whom he had so very lately persecuted and despised. And what a striking contrast does he now exhibit to what he was himself but a few hours before? A greater change there could not then be upon any man's heart, and soul, and moral feelings; but he had seen the Son of God, and the blessed sight transformed him. He had beheld him with the eye of faith, and he was thereby changed into the same image. He was now a monument of mercy, and a living example of the great truth, "If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold all things are become new."

We are not informed how Saul was exercised during those three days which he spent in Damascus without sight, and without eating or drinking anything. He would doubtless have been deeply humbled by a thorough sense of his own unworthiness; he would have been greatly cast down by the thought of all that he had done; he would have been lifting up his soul to God out of the depths of his contrition, and he would, in all probability, have been so fearfully overwhelmed with remorse and despondency,

that, for a time, he might have been the prey of the withering apprehension that the Lord had forsaken him, that he had cast him off for ever, and that he had sworn in his wrath that he should never enter into his rest. But there cannot be a doubt that the Holy Spirit was thereby preparing him—as a chosen vessel to himself, for “counting everything but loss for Christ, that he might be found in him, not having his own righteousness, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith; that he might know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings; that he might bear his name before the Gentiles, and kings and children of Israel; and that he might finish his course with joy, and receive a crown of righteousness in the great day of the Lord.”

Such, then, was the manner in which the Lord himself was pleased to magnify the riches of his grace in the conversion of the Apostle Paul; and there are two or three practical remarks which suggest themselves in the way of improvement.

(1.) In the *first* place, we may learn from the subject, what a blessed ground of security all true believers are possessed of in the midst of every difficulty, danger, and threatening calamity.

The saints at Damascus were in very great distress; they were reduced to the last extremity; and, while the help of man was vain, they were literally shut in to the faith of the gospel. But yet they had a strong tower in the name of the Lord, and they ran to it for safety. They were enabled to put their trust and confidence in him. They abode under his shadow till their dangers were overpast. And, if the people of God would still pursue the same course, they have the same strong tower, the same fortress, the same Redeemer—able, and willing, and mighty as ever to be to them a hiding-place from the wind and “a covert from the tempest, and the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.” They are encouraged to go to him continually, and cast themselves upon his mercy, faithfulness, and truth. They are exhorted to seek him earnestly, resolutely, and perseveringly. They have many promises—exceeding great and precious, that it shall be well with the righteous at last. And, if they were only able to “commit the keeping of their souls in well-doing, into the hands of a merciful and faithful Creator,” O! how patiently might they possess their souls in the midst of many grievances! How calmly might they submit to many calamities! How contentedly might they embrace the rod of chastening affliction! How confidently might they calculate that, in his own good time, the Lord would deliver them out of them all! And how thankfully might they bless and praise his name—alike for the sorrows as well as for the joys which he hath sent them!

(2.) In the *second* place, we may learn from this passage, what a dangerous thing it is for sinners to persecute the Church of Christ.

The scribes and Pharisees were bitter enemies to Christ himself, and to his Church, cause, and kingdom. They had so grieved the Holy Spirit by their obstinate resistance to the truth, that they were given up to a judicial blindness. The things that belonged to their peace were hid from their eyes; and, though Paul was graciously arrested and made a monument of grace, still he was but a solitary example in the midst of a host of hardened persecutors. And even in his case, "it was hard for him to kick against the pricks." It was hard for him to do what could not have failed to have recoiled with tremendous retribution on himself, unless he had been plucked as a brand from the burning; and the same thing is, and has been, and will be true of all those who set themselves against the Lord, and against his anointed ONE, saying in the pride of their hearts, "let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us." For "he that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh, the Lord shall have them in derision. And then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure."

It is very true that, by the mercy of God, believers are not now called upon to pass through the same fiery trials which overtook those who, in former days, were persecuted to the death. There is now a sort of honour attached to the Christian name, and a stigma stamped upon its despisers. And there are very few to be found in a Christian country, who would not be very much hurt, if not grievously offended, by their Christianity being even so much as called in question. But yet, for all this, the opposition of ungodly men to the "truth as it is in Jesus," has not been laid aside; the reproach of the cross has not yet ceased; and though the spirit of the world be now much altered in appearance, it is substantially the very same spirit that it ever was. It is still an ungodly spirit, and therefore its friendship is enmity against God. It is still a deriding spirit, and therefore its sneers, and ridicule, and scorn, must, in some shape or another, be borne by all those who would, in right earnest, take up their cross and follow their Master. It is still a deceiving spirit, and therefore it will speak peace to the troubled conscience "where there is no peace." It is still a perverting spirit, inspiring a false faith, and a false hope—a counterfeit love, and a counterfeit humility. And it is still a persecuting spirit, breathing a most thorough aversion and hatred at least, if not "threatenings and slaughter, against the disciples of the Lord."

How many are there among those that are called Christians, who are not merely careless themselves, but who do every thing in their power to laugh the godly out of their religion, and make them careless as they are themselves? How many are there who will not scruple, in substance

at least, to say that "a little of Christianity may do well enough, but that it becomes offensive when it is made the great concern of life?" How many are there who would literally be ashamed of being even suspected to be religious in earnest? How many are there who would verily rejoice, if they should hear of pious people falling into sin? And how many are there who seem at least to experience no small satisfaction, if they can succeed in getting something against the Saviour's followers, whereby they may wound their good name, and, through them, inflict a stab upon their Master's name, and cause, and honour? Ah! there are many such to be found in this evil world; and whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, they may be assured that they are lying under the guilt of cherishing a persecuting spirit; that the Prince of Life is speaking to them in the passage before us, "Why persecutest thou me?" and that, unless they repent, they are in very great danger of knowing, by a sad and bitter experience, that it is hard for them to "kick against the pricks," when the things that belong to their peace shall be hid from their eyes.

(3.) In the *third* place, we may learn from this passage what are the prominent characteristics of true conversion. These will be apparent to any one who takes the trouble of comparing Saul, the persecutor, with Paul, the preacher. It will thence be obvious enough that a very great change takes place in genuine conversion; insomuch, that the subjects of it are, in many points of view, the opposite of what they were themselves before. Once they were blind, but now they see—once they were proud, but now they are meek and lowly in heart—once they were self-righteous, but now they loathe themselves—and once they were indifferent, but now they are constrained to say, "What must I do?" "What wilt thou have me to do?"

It will also be obvious that, as the change is great, so also is the difficulty with which it is gone through, "Strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." It was no trivial cause that could have so subdued the proud mind of Saul; it was no trivial cause that could have so laid him in the dust; it was no little matter to be exercised with convictions like his; and it was no slight matter to be so greatly overwhelmed that, for three days together, he could neither eat nor drink.

It will likewise be obvious that, as this change is great, and trying, and passed through with difficulty, so also it will not merely be a permanent one, but it will evince itself by a life and conversation becoming the gospel. This was eminently exemplified in the future history of Paul; for the whole of his after life together was just one continued chain of evidences of the reality of that great work which was wrought

within him on the way to Damascus. And, therefore, the practical question which it most concerns us all to answer for ourselves, is this—viz., whether we have yet become the subjects of this blessed change? “Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” And “neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.” “Am I a new creature?” is the most important question which a human being can ever be called upon, in this life, to answer; and the importance of it is exceedingly enhanced by the fact, that there are counterfeits of it. There are some who have experienced awakenings, and who are thereby encouraged to hope that they are savingly converted, even at the very time that they are resting in these awakenings, instead of resting in the finished work of the Son of God. There are others who have awakenings, and who think that, on this account, all is well with them, even at the very time that they are panting after the dust of the earth, and following after their own covetousness. And there are others who have awakenings, and who thereby take it for granted that they are already safe and secure, and dwell assured beyond the risk of failure, long before they have literally had time to buckle on their harness, or prove their armour, or try what spirit they are of.

Now it is exceedingly manifest, from the whole of Scripture together, that mere awakenings are not sufficient evidences of conversion; that they often go as they come, like the morning cloud and the early dew; that they often leave not a trace behind them, “like the baseless fabric of a vision;” and that, by themselves, therefore, they are very far from being satisfactory. It is also just as manifest, that a Christian, consistent, and godly life is the only sure and satisfying evidence of a true profession; that, by their good fruits, believers may be known; and that, without these fruits, nothing can possibly make up for the want. And, when we bear in mind that Christianity, like every thing else that grows, requires time and care, and favourable seasons before it will mature or ripen, and bring forth fruit unto holiness; and that, like every thing else that is valuable, it requires trials, tests, and evidences to distinguish it from what may have its appearance, and from what may pretend to its spirit, Oh, how tremblingly ought we to speak! What fear, and watchfulness, and prayer ought we not to join with our rejoicings? Yea, what brokenness of heart and spirit, lest we should, at last, have reason to be ashamed of our confidence, and to join in the sad—sad lamentation of the Prophet, “The harvest is past, and the summer is ended, but we are not saved.”



## LECTURE XXVI.

THE DAY OF PENTECOST.

BY THE REV. M. F. PARKER, BRECHIN.

Acts ii. 1-13.

THIS portion of the Acts of the Apostles brings before our minds a most memorable event in the early history of Christianity. It records the miraculous effusion of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, and illustrates the fulfilment of the promise which our Lord gave to his disciples immediately before his ascension, "Ye shall be baptised with the Holy Ghost not many days hence."

A time of waiting and of expectation was given to the first disciples of our Saviour. Their faith was tried—their hope was exercised—their spirit of prayer and dependence was confirmed—their perseverance was manifested; and when these important purposes were accomplished in the experience of the apostles, the Spirit was sent down upon them in copious effusion, that they might be prepared for the great work of preaching repentance and forgiveness of sins, through the death, resurrection, ascension, and intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Luke, who, according to the consent of antiquity, is the historian of the Acts of the Apostles, gives testimony to the perseverance of the first disciples, and to their patient expectation of the fulfilment of the Saviour's promise. It is said in the first ver. of this chapter, "when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place."

The day of Pentecost was a religious festival among the Jews. It was one of their great yearly feasts, and was instituted to commemorate the giving of the law at Sinai. The name of Pentecost is of Greek origin, and denotes the fiftieth day. The festival was called by the Jews, the feast of weeks. Seven weeks elapsed between the institution of the Passover, and the giving of the law; and on the fiftieth day after the observance of the Passover were the Israelites required to keep the

feast of Pentecost. The first fruits of the wheat harvest were commanded to be offered unto the Lord, in devout acknowledgment of God as the source of every temporal blessing. The institution of the feast of weeks is recorded in Lev. xxiii. 15, 16, "Ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the Sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave-offering, seven Sabbaths shall be complete. Even unto the morrow after the seventh Sabbath shall ye number fifty days, and ye shall offer a new meat-offering unto the Lord."

"When the day of Pentecost was fully come"—on this occasion it was the fiftieth day from the resurrection of the Saviour, and it was to be distinguished by the extraordinary descent of the Holy Spirit. As one Jewish festival had witnessed the crucifixion, so another was to behold the glory arising from the ascension of the Saviour, in the first fruits of the Spirit bestowed according to the promise, which had been given for the strengthening of the faith of the disciples.

The period chosen, for the miraculous effusion of the Holy Spirit, was, when there were assembled a great multitude in Jerusalem, in order that the miracle might be rendered the more illustrious, and that the fruits of it might be the more plentiful. "For the same purpose (says one) did Christ oftentimes go up to Jerusalem upon the holy days to the end these miracles which he wrought might be known to many, that in the greater assembly of people there might be the greater fruit of his doctrine."

When the day of Pentecost was fully come, the disciples "were all with one accord in one place." It is not stated whether the place was the upper room which is mentioned in the first chapter, or whether it was some other apartment. This point is of little consequence to be determined, but it is instructive to observe that the hundred and twenty disciples were all of "one accord." They were of one mind. They were one in faith, in hope, and in spiritual sentiment, waiting in patience and perseverance the accomplishment of the promise which the Saviour of their love had bestowed. A spirit of unity among the disciples of Christ is greatly to be desired—unity founded upon attachment to the exalted power of the Redeemer, and guided by the hopes which the word of his promise has taught them to entertain. When such a spirit prevails, the Divine blessing may be expected to be received in the most plentiful abundance. It is to be observed, that while this spirit of peace and harmony, and of prayerful dependence and waiting upon God, was existing among the early disciples, the presence of the Holy Spirit was most copiously bestowed. While they were waiting with one accord, Jesus was remembering in his intercession the Church which had been so recently purchased by his own blood. While they were

united in faith, and hope, and prayer, God was preparing to send forth his Spirit, and to endue the disciples with miraculous gifts, by means of which their own faith was to be unspeakably confirmed, while the power and influence of the truth were to be mightily increased.

In the second verse, it is said, "suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting."

We cannot doubt that this sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, was intended to solemnize the disciples of Christ, to awaken them to the greatest spiritual earnestness, and to make the descent of the Holy Ghost, in his miraculous presence, an event ever to be remembered as of the most impressive and salutary nature. The sound from heaven indicated that the Spirit of the Lord proceeded from heaven, whither Christ had so lately ascended from the view of the apostles. The rushing of the mighty wind was an emblem of the Spirit's influence, and of his irresistible power. The accompanying circumstances were peculiarly calculated to impress and solemnize the apostles, and the early disciples of our Lord, and to instruct his followers of every succeeding age of the Church. Frequently throughout the Scriptures are the Spirit's influences represented by the wind. Our Saviour, in his conversation with Nicodemus, spoke of the influences of the Spirit in regeneration, and in consequence of their mysterious nature, likened them to the operations of that element: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." It is under the same emblem in Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones, that the Spirit's influences are represented: "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live."

The sound of the rushing mighty wind "filled all the house where they were sitting." Under the plain and impressive statements of Scripture, it is not commendable to search too far for hidden meanings—for meanings which depend for their existence on the exercise of a fanciful ingenuity. Yet we may find, that as the sound of the rushing mighty wind filled the whole house, the presence of the Spirit will be equal to the requirements of the whole Church, his aids will be dispensed to meet and supply the spiritual wants of every member of Christ's body. Wherever there is faith in his Divine person, and prayerful dependence upon his influences, these influences, for the glory of the Redeemer's intercession, will be bestowed for promoting all the purposes of vital godliness.

When the disciples were solemnized by the miraculous sound from heaven, when their souls were brought into a quickened state, when they

were most sensibly impressed, that the Lord was about to perform some extraordinary work in behalf of his infant Church, "there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them."

It was not enough to give an emblem of the Spirit's presence and influence by the "sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind." The Redeemer, in his Divine wisdom, adapted his instruction to the special circumstances in which his disciples were placed; and to give them the most impressive assurance of the presence of his Spirit, he presented to them a sensible sign of the gifts which his Spirit was to bestow. "There appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of fire." There was a visible manifestation of the Spirit's presence, and, moreover, a significant emblem of the gifts with which the Spirit would endue the apostles for the work in which they were commissioned to engage. They peculiarly required to be endued with the gift of speech, that they, plain and unlettered men, might go forth and preach the glad tidings of salvation to people of every language under heaven. To satisfy them that the gifts peculiarly required would be bestowed, the Holy Spirit appeared in the shape of tongues. He had descended upon Christ at his baptism, in the form of a dove, to indicate the nature and office of the Redeemer as the Prince of Peace, and the author of reconciliation. And, on the day of Pentecost, when the disciples were to be solemnly assured of the presence of the Spirit, and to be graciously confirmed in the truth that his aids would be given in preaching Christ exalted, to "give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins," to prepare and qualify the apostles for this high vocation, and to satisfy them and the first disciples of our Lord, that every requisite qualification would be given for such a service, the Spirit of God descended in a visible form, and appeared unto them "in cloven tongues like as of fire."

The gift of speech was indicated in the special manifestation which was vouchsafed of the Spirit's presence; and the fire significantly pointed out the power and efficacy of the Spirit's work. The enlightening and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit were shadowed forth under this emblem. The cloven tongues, like as of fire, seemed to say, that the Holy Spirit would accompany the living voice of the first preachers of the gospel, and make them successful in destroying the power of superstition, in overcoming unbelief, in giving deliverance from the condemnation and bondage of sin to them who accepted the offers of salvation, which were proclaimed in the name of Jesus.

These tongues of fire, which indicated that the living and irresistible influences of the Spirit of God would accompany the preaching of the cross of Christ, causing it to pierce even to "the dividing asunder of

soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow,"—these tongues of fire were divided. This circumstance appears to intimate the variety of speech which would be conferred by the Holy Spirit, and perhaps also it denotes the Divine power which would accompany the preaching of the Word of Life,—that it would divide the dominion of sin and overcome it, and plant in its ruins the beauties of holiness.

It is said that "it sat upon each of them." The meaning appears to be, that the Comforter descended with his extraordinary gifts upon each of the disciples, and endued them severally with the gifts adapted to the various offices to which they were consecrated, and to the various services which they were respectively called to discharge. "It sat upon them;" this circumstance especially declares that the gifts of the Spirit would be permanently bestowed, that they would continue with the disciples, and qualify them for the work which the Saviour had solemnly directed them to perform. An impressive event, certainly this is, which is recorded to have taken place on the day of Pentecost. The almighty power of the Spirit of God is manifested by a "rushing mighty wind," and the suitable presence of the Spirit in qualifying the servants of Christ for their spiritual calling, in enlightening and sanctifying believers, in spreading the truth throughout the world, and in making it successful in destroying the formidable barriers of unbelief, idolatry, and ungodliness, is embodied in the symbol of "cloven tongues like as of fire."

On the feast of Pentecost, by Divine appointment, an offering of the first fruits of the harvest was made unto the Lord; and this miraculous descent of the Spirit of Christ, and his resting upon each of the disciples, were the first fruits of his influences sent down through the mediation of the Redeemer, as a blessed testimony that he had ascended to his throne as Mediator. These were the first fruits of the spiritual harvest, which consists in the ingathering of the redeemed, by the special power of the Spirit of God, during all periods of the present dispensation of grace.

The fourth verse shows what were the consequences of this extraordinary effusion of the Holy Spirit. "They were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."

As it appears to us, all they who were assembled, not only the apostles and the seventy disciples, but the whole that were met together on the day of Pentecost, and were earnestly waiting upon the baptism of the Holy Spirit, they were all filled with his presence. We do not affirm that the same gifts, and the same degrees of these gifts, were equally imparted to every disciple; but such gifts, and in such measure,

were bestowed, as were conducive to the glory of the Redeemer, and for the immediate advancement of the best interests of Divine truth. The evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit with his gifts and graces among the disciples was, that "they began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."

On the day of Pentecost, the diversity of human speech is made subservient to the spread of the glad tidings of salvation. The miracle consisted especially in giving—without study, or any of the ordinary means of acquiring the knowledge of speech—the first disciples the power of preaching the gospel in a great variety of languages. A supernatural command was given over human speech, and this miraculous power adapted to the requirements of the Church, was rendered available for the spread of the gospel. "As the Spirit gave them utterance," so did they speak. Order was preserved by the Spirit of all order. The Holy Ghost was presiding in that assembly. He who conferred the miraculous gift, also gave it direction; and as the Spirit gave the power of utterance to the disciples, so did they proclaim the truths of everlasting life.

The gift of speaking in different languages was conferred, in Divine wisdom. It was bestowed at a period when an exceeding amount of spiritual good was to be accomplished by this peculiar agency. In the fifth verse, we are informed that "there were dwelling at Jerusalem, Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven." They had come from the different nations throughout which they were dispersed. In all nations and countries at that time known, as at the present day, Jews were to be found, and they had assembled in Jerusalem, at the feast of Pentecost, for the purpose of worshipping the God of Israel according to the appointments of the law. The temple was still standing, the temple service was as yet observed, and these worshippers had repaired to Jerusalem to appear before the Lord. Besides, the general expectation which was entertained at this time, that the Messiah was to come, might have induced the greater number of devout Jews to have taken up their residence in the Holy City. The sceptre had departed from Judah, and the belief was general that Shiloh was to come.

When the fame of the miracle was spread abroad—when it was made known that there had been such an overawing sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, in the place where the disciples of our Lord were assembled, and that there had appeared cloven tongues like as of fire, the multitude came together. Astonishment and wonder laid hold of every mind. The reality of the miracle was impressively manifested by the amazing fact, that in the same place the gospel was heard by every man, in a language which he understood. By the agency of the preter-

natural inspiration of the Spirit of God, men from so many different countries and nations heard the truths of eternal life in the languages which they were daily using, and to which from infancy they had been accustomed. The effect produced by it upon the minds of them who were witnesses of this miraculous work of the Spirit was extraordinary. "They were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, behold, are not all these who speak Galileans?" These speakers had had no opportunities of acquiring the languages of foreign nations. They had been accustomed to little or no intercourse with the inhabitants of other lands. They had gone over hill and valley in fellowship with Jesus, and had toiled for their daily bread at fishing in the sea of Galilee; and how came these unlearned men with such accuracy, plainness, and power of speech, to declare such important truths, and with so much judgment as they discoursed? "How hear we every man in our own tongue wherein we were born?" The Parthian, the Mede, the Elamite or Persian, and the dweller in Mesopotamia, heard the gospel in languages which they respectively understood. The inhabitants of Judea heard the Galilean speak without his speech betraying him. They from the provinces of Asia Minor, from Cappadocia, Pontus, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, heard the gospel preached by Galileans in languages which they knew from their earliest days. The Egyptian and the inhabitants of Lybya about Cyrene, heard the truths of salvation. Strangers from Rome, these being Jews and Jewish proselytes who usually resided in Rome, listened to the wonderful works of God, while unlettered Galileans spoke in the Latin tongue. Cretes and Arabians heard the gospel in languages with which they were respectively familiar. The wonderful works of God were proclaimed, in the hearing of a multitude so mixed and coming from so many different lands. Each for himself heard in his own language the truths of salvation—heard of the forgiveness of sin and of redemption through Christ, who had risen from the dead, and had bestowed these marvellous gifts of his Spirit as the first fruits and evidences of his intercession. Astonishment laid hold of their minds; they were in doubt, and said one to another, "What meaneth this?" There was something in it so strange, and so passing all their comprehension, that they were left in utter amazement. There were others on whom this stupendous miracle had another effect. Deny it they could not. But they sought to bring the word and works of God into discredit and disrepute—they ascribed the powers of speech, in which the "wonderful works of God" were proclaimed, to the intoxicating effects of the sweet fruits of the vintage. They assailed the first preachers of the cross of Christ with mockery, and said of them, "These men are full of new wine." Such was the false charge which was brought

against the work of the Holy Spirit, such the calumny that was raised against them, on whom the Spirit rested in extraordinary abundance, and whom he enabled by miraculous power to preach the truths of salvation in force and plainness in so many different languages to strangers, who had assembled in Jerusalem from every nation under heaven.

The next section of the apostolic history introduces us to the defence which Peter made of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and of the disciples of our Lord, against the false accusation which was laid to their charge. On that profound and interesting discourse we do not enter in the present lecture. Let us take a retrospect of the passage on which these comments have been made, and gather such instructions of a practical nature as this portion of the sacred history more obviously suggests.

It is good to wait upon God. It is profitable to abide his time in patience, in prayer, and in hope, for the reception of spiritual blessings. That principle is instructively embodied in the example and experience of the early Church. "When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place." They were waiting in earnest hope and fervid prayer till the Saviour, according to the promise which he had given, bestowed some precious evidence of his spiritual presence. This state of dependence and waiting upon the Saviour, is faithfully illustrated in the experience of the first Christians, when it is recorded of them, "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication." The same view of the Christian Church especially instructs us, that it is a duty and a privilege to wait upon God, to exercise patience and dependence upon his sovereign will, and to entertain hope that the Lord, in answer to prayer, will fulfil the desires of his people, and that he will graciously accomplish the promises which he has put upon record for the nourishment of their faith. The apostles, and they who were assembled with them, were called upon to exercise faith and patience, and when the day of Pentecost was fully come, the first fruits of the Spirit were most abundantly sent down upon their assembly. The prayer which had been offered was not raised in vain. The hope which had been entertained was not disappointed. And under the ordinary economy of the Spirit's influences, the same gracious exercises of the soul will be accompanied in due season, with an enriching blessing.

Let us gather instruction also from the beautiful and refreshing circumstance, that "they were all with one accord." Strifes and divisions were forgotten and laid aside. The question had been at one time raised, who should be the greatest among them. Hopes of worldly greatness had mixed with their following of the Redeemer. They had expected that he should have restored the kingdom to Israel. They had looked for a temporal kingdom, and with lingering attachment to worldly



magnificence, had hoped to share in its possessions, its power, and its glory. All these causes of disunion and of temporal vanity are laid in the dust, and of one accord they continue waiting for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It was this spirit of unity, directed in steadfastness and prayer towards the accomplishment of the Redeemer's promise, which was especially approved in the early Christian Church, and upon which the extraordinary gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit were most copiously poured out. In proportion as the same spirit of brotherly agreement and forbearance prevails among the followers of Christ, so in proportion may the ever increasing supplies of the Spirit's influences be expected to be received in sanctifying and comforting believers, and in spreading the triumphs of the truth over the world. "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." In this faith and hope an apostle earnestly exhorts Christians to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," and with that blessed fruit of the Spirit of God, the "edifying of the body of Christ" is intimately allied, "till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

This spiritual agreement is not to be sought after at any compromise of the honour due to the Redeemer, nor to be purchased with the sacrifice of Divine truth; but where that truth has exerted the greatest influence over the Christian Church, and has imbued it the most plentifully with its grace, there, it may be justly affirmed, will be the most of the Spirit which led the disciples to be of one accord, which delivered them from the leaven of division and strife, and prevailed upon them to wait in patience, in prayer and in hope, upon the presence of the Holy Spirit. There is a most blessed inducement to Christ's body to desire after unity either in congregations or in larger sections of the Church, when it is remembered, that, when the disciples were of one accord, waiting in patient submission to the Divine will, the largest manifestations of the Divine favour were bestowed.

The portion of the Scriptures under consideration should increase our faith in the power of the Holy Spirit in accomplishing the ends for which he is sent. His power is mysterious and inexplicable; "a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind," represented his agency on the day of Pentecost. It is true that this was miraculous, yet it contains significant instruction regarding the operation of the Spirit of God, when faith is resting on the promise of the Redeemer respecting the sending of the Comforter, and prayer is offered for his presence in the means of grace. We hear not now, as in the first days of the Gospel, the rushing of the mighty wind, the emblem of the Spirit's irresistible power in overcoming unbelief, and in sanctifying the heart upon which his influences are shed.

Yet were there greater faith in the Divinity of his person, and more frequent and fervid prayer for the success of his work, there would be consequent upon such faith and prayer more abundant evidences of his presence in the observance of ordinances. It is his office to root out unbelief, to subdue every desire of the unregenerate heart, to destroy all self-righteousness, and every sentiment which is in any way opposed to the humbling truths of the Gospel, and to bring the soul that is under his direction gladly to receive the truth as it is in Jesus. To the view of faith these consequences are impressively declared, in the events of the day of Pentecost. In the cloven tongues, like as of fire, you have set forth to your view the purifying and refining influences of the Holy Spirit, and these influences are peculiarly promised to accompany the preaching of the word. As fire refines metal of its dross, and causes it to come forth from the furnace without taint or alloy, so does the Holy Spirit, by means of the word, purify the soul, and cleanse it from the defilements of sin, and make it resplendent in the beauties of holiness. We should desire to improve what is here declared regarding the power of the Spirit, by increasing in prayer for his purifying influences, that they may accompany the word, and descend upon ordinances. If greater faith existed in the promise of the Spirit's influences, in that power by which, through means of the word, he is able to subdue all things to himself, there would follow upon that faith increasing evidences of the practical results which he accomplishes. As we recur in meditation to the amazing miracle of the Spirit's presence on the day of Pentecost, let us desire that he may descend with increasing manifestations of his Divine presence and power upon the preaching of the word. We do not look for preternatural influences. But we may most justly expect, that, in answer to prayer, his presence will be manifested in subduing enmity to God, and hatred to his truth, and in cleansing from the defilements of sin.

How blessed it would be to have an increase of the holy and life-giving influences of the Spirit of God, that they, as purifying gales of wind, might chase away every lingering vapour of unbelief and ungodliness which presses over the Church and the world; that these influences, as purifying fire, might thoroughly refine every heart, and bring every soul under the dominion of the truth! "Awake, O north wind, and come thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits."

The example of the primitive church should be improved by us, in leading us to wait and hope in prayer, and in "one accord," for the increased presence of the Holy Spirit. It was when the disciples were thus prayerfully awaiting the fulfilment of the Saviour's promise, that the Spirit of God descended upon his Church. While every element of

worldliness seemed to be absorbed, unity was prevailing among the disciples regarding the completion of the promise. Their prayers were heard. Their hopes were far more than realized. Their unity, peace, harmony, were blessed. Suddenly, to that earnest and devout assembly, the sound as of a rushing mighty wind, and the amazing and sensible imbodiment of the Spirit's presence and gifts in cloven tongues like as of fire, gave illustration to the truth of the Redeemer's promise, "Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost, not many days hence."

Now, we say, that this example of unity, prayer, faith, and hope, among the early disciples of our Lord, stand upon record to encourage his disciples, till the end of the world, to unite in the same believing sentiments, and devotional exercises, for the purifying and refreshing influences of the Holy Spirit. Under his living presence, who may affirm what blessed consequences will follow? The Scriptures have directed us to look for liberal consequences, even to hope and pray according to the promise, "until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest."

The united prayers, and patient expectation, the believing hope of a few sincere disciples, may be blessed not only for enriching their own souls, for blessing their own families, for doing good to their surrounding neighbourhood, for sanctifying the congregation with which they are immediately connected. These prayers, and that patient and prayerful expectation, may bring down from the presence of God, before whom our Intercessor appears, a most plentiful blessing, so that numbers ever increasing would be added to the Church. So it was on the day of Pentecost—there was but an handful of disciples. One apartment contained them all. Yet, from that one apartment, and in answer to the prayers of them who were assembled within its walls, there was sent down a most copious demonstration of the Spirit's presence, and of his Divine and blessed gifts. The word spoken was gladly received, "and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls."

The miracle which the day of Pentecost beheld, and which was attested by so many credible witnesses, illustrates the Divine wisdom in the propagation of the gospel. The fame of what had occurred, spread rapidly abroad. There were Jews, devout men out of every nation under heaven, then assembled in Jerusalem. These Jews heard, in the languages with which they were daily familiar, the wonderful works of God, they heard of the way of life through a crucified and exalted Redeemer. It was ordered in Divine wisdom, that the Spirit of God should descend with the signs of his preternatural power and gifts on

the day of Pentecost, when there were dwellers in Jerusalem from so many and such distant lands. These Jews are brought under the power of truth as it is in Jesus, and made instrumental in spreading the knowledge of salvation throughout the lands in which they were dispersed. Accordingly, it was in the very countries which are mentioned in this passage, that Christianity was first preached, and over which it was spread by the labours of the apostles and evangelists, and those whom God raised up and endued with an evangelistic spirit to work in his vineyard. These events plainly bear upon them the impress of the hand of God, and illustrate the glory which the Divine wisdom displayed in diffusing the glad tidings of salvation.

We are to remember that the same Spirit who gave the power to speak in such variety of tongues—the same Spirit, although not with miraculous gifts, is promised to accompany the preaching of the Word, and to make it successful in fulfilling the ends for which it has been revealed. Let these important truths be dwelling in our minds, and let it be our persevering prayer, that the Holy Spirit may subdue the enmity which is naturally in the heart to the truth as it is in Jesus, and that, with his purifying influences, he may cleanse from sin, and sanctify through means of the truth, and make the Redeemer's kingdom pre-eminently successful. In secret, in private, in the courts of God's house, let there be prayer for the Spirit's enlightening and sanctifying presence; and in proportion as that prayerful dependence increases, will there be found the unity of mind and purpose which God, in the economy of his grace, so greatly acknowledges by his enriching blessing.

Let us observe, in conclusion, that the effects of these miraculous works of the Holy Spirit, on the day of Pentecost, were various. Some who beheld them were amazed, and in doubt. It would have been blessed, indeed, if that perplexity had been the commencement of spiritual existence. The first awakenings from spiritual ignorance and insensibility, are sometimes attended with kindred sentiments, and possibly they who at first are under their power may be brought, by teaching from above, to rejoice in the liberty which the truth bestows. Others, in mockery, ascribed the gifts of the Holy Ghost, the preaching of the gospel in such variety of languages, to the effects of "new wine." The cause of Christ has been assailed with opposition from the beginning, but its truth, although the world's hatred, with darkening shadow, should attend its progress—its truth, accompanied by the Spirit, whose power is irresistible, will render it finally and permanently triumphant, even till the purposes of the Divine glory are accomplished in the salvation of the redeemed. Our faith, in such prospects, should be con-

firmed by the events of the day of Pentecost, and our hopes strengthened in the power of the truth, when it is accompanied with the Spirit's presence. It is comforting to know, and refreshing to believe, that the Lord has sacredly pledged his promise to the fruitfulness of the word of life; "for, as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall my word be that goeth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."

## LECTURE XXVII.

REV. CHARLES C. STEWART, DUNNING.

“ Then Job answered and said, even to-day is my complaint bitter ; my stroke is heavier than my groaning. Oh that I knew where I might find him : that I might come even to his seat ! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know the words which he would answer me, and understand what he would say unto me. Will he plead against me with his great power ? No ; but he would put strength in me.”—JOB xxiii. 1-6.

SAINTS in heaven cannot express the longing desire of the Patriarch in the text ; for in heaven they see God face to face—they are ever with the Lord, and are happy in the uninterrupted, unclouded enjoyment of the light of his countenance. The condemned in hell utter no such complaint as this—they labour to forget God—their fruitless effort is to seek a deeper bed in hell, to shun God’s presence, to hide themselves from the eye of the Omnipresent One, and to escape the power of an Omnipotent arm. The language of the text is exclusively that of men on earth, although it also characterizes the state and feelings only of some of the guilty children of men. Some among the human race have already sought God, and found him a present help in the time of trouble. It is their blessed privilege to have daily and constant fellowship with God, to be going on their way to Zion rejoicing in the God of their salvation, and drawing out of Christ’s fulness, “ grace upon grace.” This class of the earth’s inhabitants, though comparatively but few in number, differ from the saints in heaven, not in the *source* or *nature*, but in the *degree* of their joy. The saints on earth are aiming at the full fruition of God’s unveiled glory, which constitutes the enjoyment and rest of the saints in heaven. But the majority of men are ignorant of God, far from him, averse to him ; and in this fearful trait of their character they resemble those who are lost for ever ; they say, “ Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.” The text, therefore, does not express the sentiments certainly of this latter class.

The desire expressed in the text, is that of one under *affliction* ; and its very language at once and readily points out the class of persons whose feelings and desires it so affectingly expresses. It is neither the

language of the careless, unregenerate man, nor is it that of the assured and advanced believer. The former calls not on God; the latter enjoys God in daily fellowship and communion with Christ. It is therefore the prayer of an awakened sinner, crying and longing for reconciliation to God, under deep conviction, and full of sorrow and shame on account of it; or (as is more likely in Job's present state) it is the cry of the backslider awakened anew to his danger and guilt, under God's chastisements, remembering the sweet enjoyment of brighter days, and ardently longing for its return.

Our text is the language of distance, of desire, of freedom, and of hope.

I. It implies a painful sense of distance from God.

Men of no religion are "far off" from God, but this gives them no concern. It] rather constitutes their happiness. "They say God doth not see, neither doth the God of Jacob regard us." They live "without God, and without hope," but have no serious regret, and feel no alarm on this account.

With the believer in Christ, it is otherwise; he has experienced an important change. He too was once "far off," but he has been brought nigh by the blood of Christ, and by the renewing of the Holy Ghost. The presence of Christ constitutes his joy, and he mourns nothing so much as the loss of God's favour. Sensible communion with his God, and the enjoyment of the smile of his heavenly Father's approbation, is a loss which even the true believer may suffer. Occasions will occur when he may have to lament with the Church of old, that "His beloved has withdrawn himself and is gone;" that it is "not with him as in months past, when the candle of the Lord shone upon his tabernacle, and when by its light he was enabled to walk in darkness."

Sad and comfortless as this state of distance from God must be to the believer, still he is painfully *conscious* of his own state, and crying like Job, "Oh that I knew where I might find him." His soul is not so benumbed by the loss he experiences in "going without the sun," as to fall into carnal security, or into the inactivity and torpor of spiritual death; he longs for a renewed token of God's love to his soul, and while walking in darkness and having no light, yet still cries to God in his distress.

This prayer presents to our view the afflicted returning child of God, in something like the attitude of Jacob at Peniel, as he wrestled with the angel of the covenant and prevailed. Both Jacob and Job betake themselves to God for deliverance in the hour of trouble and calamity. Jacob, under the dread of an impending evil, fearful of a brother's ven-

geance, wrestles for the blessing with a *present God*, and the *presence* of the Angel of the Covenant at once encourages and strengthens him for so blessed and amicable a conflict, in which all his fears are dispelled, and his confidence in the God of Bethel greatly augmented. Jacob, made strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might, needed to fear no evil, for in wrestling with God, he only discovered more clearly wherein his great strength lay, and whence it was derived. The case of the Patriarch Job was different. It was one of much keener distress. His were not imaginary or merely dreaded evils. The hand of God lay heavy upon him—God had caused the waves and billows of temporal calamities, bereavements, and bodily affliction, to roll over him. Under the pressure of heavy trials, with no earthly friends to yield him solid consolation, he cries out, “Terrors are turned upon me; they come upon me as the wide breaking in of waters; in the desolation they have rolled themselves upon me.” And to aggravate his distress and agony, “He cries and shouts to God, but God seems to shut out his prayer, and to hide himself from his distress. It is soul-harrowing agony arising from the *absence* of God’s favour and love, that dictates the prayer, “Oh that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat. Behold I go forward, but he is not there, and backward, but I cannot perceive him; on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him.”

These doleful lamentations cannot fail to remind us of the sufferings of him, whom doubtless in this respect, Job in a measure typified; when under similar painful desertion (the bitterest ingredient in the cup given him to drink), Christ exclaimed in the prophetic language of the Psalmist, “O my God, I cry in the day time, and thou hearest not, and in the night season, and am not silent. Why hast thou forsaken me; why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?” (Ps. xxii. 1, 2.)

The *occasions* that most generally give birth to the complaint and cry in the text are numerous and various. We may advert to two of them.

1. Bodily suffering, or the pressure of severe and long-continued outward calamities, may contribute to enfeeble the mind, and lead the soul to conclude that it is forsaken by its God. Little as we think of God in a state of prosperity, and little as we are inclined to mark his hand in the earlier stages of adversity, yet when we have been long oppressed with trials, and wave after wave has been made to roll over us, the mind almost necessarily reverts to God as the author of them, not in a way of meek and quiet submission and resignation, but rather in the



way of murmuring and discontent. Thus did the Church in David's days adduce her affliction and oppression as proofs that she had been deserted by her God, and calls upon God, as though he were negligent of her welfare, to "awake and arise for her relief." (Ps. xliv. 23.) Thus also did Job, under his accumulated troubles, accuse his God, "Oh! that my grief were thoroughly weighed, and my calamity laid in the balances together. For now would it be heavier than the sand of the sea. For the arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit; the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me." (Job vi. 2-4.) Afterwards he exclaims, "I will speak in the bitterness of my soul, I will say unto God, do not condemn me? show me wherefore thou contendest with me." (Job x. 1, 2.) Heavy temporal calamities sometimes overwhelm and unhinge the mind to such a degree, as to tempt a good man to sink into despondency, if not into despair, and to entertain hard thoughts of God, and to give utterance to murmurs and accusations. The dispensations of Divine providence appear so complex and difficult, that faith is unable to explore them, or hope to rise above them. The mind magnifies its distresses, and dwells on its own griefs, to the exclusion of those grounds of consolation and causes of thankfulness afforded in the many mercies that tend to alleviate their bitterness. In reality, God is not more distant from the soul, though he appears to be so: "Clouds and darkness may be round about him;" yet "no cloud overshadows the true Christian, but his faith may discern a rainbow in it."

2. There is another and more serious occasion of distance and desertion, though we do not know that it applied to Job in all its extent. The prophet Isaiah (lix. 2, 3) explains it when he says, "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear; for your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness." It is *sin cherished*, long indulged, unrepented of, and unpardoned, that pollutes the conscience, and alienates the soul from God, however secret its indulgence, or however trivial its guilt in the sight of men. Sin is just the wandering of the soul in its thoughts, desires, and affections, from God, and God graciously makes sin itself the instrument in correcting the backslider, by making him know that "it is an evil and bitter thing for the soul to depart from the Lord his God." The righteous desert of the soul's departure from God, is God's desertion of the soul. It is in this way that God makes his own people feel his displeasure, when they backslide from him, and by this means also he shows them his abhorrence of the *sins* which they are "regarding in their hearts."

God is ever near to man, for "he is not far from any one of us." "His eye is on the *evil* and on the good, on the just and unjust." He is near the wicked for vengeance, and regards them with an eye of abhorrence and anger; but he is near the righteous for good, and regards them with approbation and love. God shows his hatred of sin, whether it be indulged by his enemies or friends, by forsaking those who thus forsake him, and cherish the abominable thing he hates. "The Lord is with you," said the Spirit of God by his prophet to the king of Judah, "while ye be with him, and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you." 2 Chron. xv. 2. Sin indulged, whether open, secret, or presumptuous, grieves the Holy Spirit, expels him from the temple he loved and cheered by his presence. The Spirit of God cannot be reconciled to lust or passion, vanity, pride, or covetousness. If we seek the destruction of indwelling or besetting sin, the Spirit of God will impart to us his grace and strength to secure the victory over them; but if we regard these iniquities in our heart, and encourage his and our enemies, what can we expect but Divine desertion.

Where, then, is the true believer, who has ever known the blessedness and peace which flows from nearness to God, and reconciliation with him through the blood of Christ, that does not feel and lament God's absence from him, and his distance from God. The saint, having lost the sense of peace with God, cannot but be troubled—he "goes mourning without the sun." When, by his own aggravated folly, he has forfeited the sense of his joy in God, through Jesus Christ, he cannot but be sorrowful. "Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled." The effects also of this banishment of God from the soul are *dangerous* as well as painful. Sin lulls the conscience asleep. As in David's case, the soul, polluted by heinous sin, sinks into a stupor, into a state of spiritual insensibility, unconscious, as it were, of its own guilt, misery, or danger. And in this state it may continue for a longer or shorter period, but not for ever. The principle of spiritual life, which is not quite extinct, must operate, and the Holy Spirit, who has been grieved by negligence and sin, descends to work conviction and to produce repentance.

Under the pangs of a guilty conscience, the now awakened sinner trembles at the thought of the multitude, the heinousness and demerit of his transgressions. His iniquities, with all their aggravations, recur to his remembrance. He says, like David, "My sin is ever before me." "Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of my head; therefore my heart faileth me." His conscience upbraids him with his

base ingratitude and criminal folly, in sinning against his gracious God and Saviour. He can think of almost nothing but the awful majesty, sovereignty, justice, and vengeance of God. "He remembers God, and is troubled." His spirit is troubled and overwhelmed, when he reflects that he has provoked God to forsake him, and to appear as an enemy against him. In the darkness of night, fire or rays of light are more conspicuous than in the light of day; and just so when the backslider is walking in darkness; he has a clearer view of the holiness and justice of God, the spirituality of the law; and in the light of Mount Sinai, the sin of his nature and the transgressions of his life are set in order before his eyes. The restoration of the rebel to his Father's favour and love is necessarily more tedious and painful. David would not permit his banished Absalom to return to Jerusalem, far less to "see the king's face," until he was thoroughly humbled, made completely submissive, and gave evidence of his true repentance; and in like manner God, in love and mercy to his erring child, hides his face from him for a season, "for a small moment," "in a little wrath," but "with everlasting kindness will he have mercy upon him." Thus the Lord deals with his backsliding children—at once in the way of *displeasure* and *encouragement*. *Displeasure* at their unfilial conduct and ingratitude, and *encouragement* by assuring them that his feelings of paternal affection and compassion have not been extinguished by their rebellious conduct, but may be revived and experienced, if they, with patience, true repentance, and earnest importunity, implore it like Job in the text, "Oh that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat!"

Let us thank God that distance is not utter desertion. When the misery of separation and distance from God is felt, the dawn of restoration and reconciliation begins. The promise checks despondency and forbids despair. "I have seen his ways, and I will heal him;" and "Unto you that fear my name, shall the Sun of Righteousness arise, with healing in his wings." We are hence led to consider our text—

## II. As the language of earnest *desire*.

The man who has fallen by iniquity, lost his "first love," and grieved the Holy Spirit, and who has involved himself in spiritual darkness and distress by sin, by impatience under Divine chastisements, or by unbelief, "when brought to himself," remembers the happiness he once enjoyed, and begins to bewail his lamentable condition. He rests not satisfied with fruitless complaints, but the desire of his soul is towards his God; he "remembers the years of the right hand of the

Most High," but is yet so ashamed and confounded at his own grievous fall or departure, that he scarcely dares venture to approach the mercy seat of God in prayer. It is against this holy God he has sinned—he has forsaken a gracious heavenly Father—the returning prodigal remembers the affectionate endearments, as well as the plenty and blessedness of a father's forsaken home, and ventures to express a desire to return, yet, afraid of the reception he may meet with, knowing and feeling, what he deserves; "I will arise," he says, "and go to my father, and say to him, father I have sinned, and done very wickedly." Like Joseph to his brethren, his Father perhaps "speaks roughly," or withdraws his presence. The penitent turns from miserable, unavailing earthly comforters to his God. But all is darkness and gloom. His cry is, "He shutteth out my prayer." What shall he do? He cannot live any longer without his God; in the urgency of self-despair, and renunciation of all creature hope, he exclaims, "Oh that I knew where I might find him;" and "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." In patience he resolves to wait, and with *desire* to "look again towards God's holy temple." "I will wait upon the Lord that hideth himself from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him."

It is one thing, dear brethren, to be conscious of distance from God, and quite another thing to be anxious to be brought near to him by the blood of Christ. Conviction of guilt and misery is not conversion. It is a small matter to feel the causes or occasions of complaint or of alienation from God, but not so to be in earnest to have them removed. What avails it, to know our separation from God, that we have lost his favour, his image, the light of his countenance, and the enjoyment of communion with him, unless we are brought to this *desire* and *anxiety*, "Oh that I knew where I might find him?"

Blessed be God, we have not to prepare this enquiry in anxious uncertainty. We know where to find the adorable object of our search "God is in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing unto men their trespasses." This heavenly message is full of mercy, and fraught with the richest encouragement to the humble enquirer, even in the darkest periods of sorrow. God is in *his Word*. Here he reveals the perfections of his nature, the covenant of his grace and love, and especially the kindness of his heart. "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and slow to anger, abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, but yet will by no means clearing the guilty." The words of God are spirit and life. Search, study, and hear the word of God with the *purpose* and *desire* of finding Him, and you will find "His promises sweet to your taste, yea sweeter than honey to your mouth."

God is seated on the *throne of grace*; and at all times, in all places, this throne is accessible. "Out of the depths," said David, "have I cried unto thee, O Lord;" "From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed." Who ever did this in vain? Draw nigh to God and he will draw nigh to you, for "He is near unto them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth." Let the desire of your soul be, "Lord, to whom can I go but unto thee, thou alone hast the words of eternal life."

III. Our text is the language of *holy freedom*. From the studied effort of Job's friends to fix on him the charge of hypocrisy, and to prove that his afflictions were judgments for his sins, it is not impossible that in order to vindicate his character, he might refer, in our text, in a way of appeal to God concerning his integrity. He appeals as it were from the unjust censures and groundless accusations of his friends, who would not listen to his vindication of himself, to the higher tribunal of the Searcher of Hearts, to the knowledge, love, faithfulness, and mercy of God, the supreme judge. Though he had much to say in favour of his own integrity before man, yet he by no means rested on any thing in himself, as the ground of his justification before God. He feels his inferiority and guilt before God, and cannot speak almost before him, lest his very words should condemn him. He is like a lamb, dumb before those who reproached him without a cause, leaving the vindication of his character in the hands of his advocate and God. He is more anxious for the Divine acquittal than for the vindication of his character before men. His language at any rate expresses a *resolution* to avail himself of the privilege of approaching the Most High with *holy freedom* and humble confidence, to present his petition and request, in a suitable manner, and to support it with weighty arguments. "Oh that I might be permitted to come even to his seat"—not of judgment but of grace—not of inflexible justice, but of sovereign mercy—not of stern majesty, but of friendly communion. It is language significant of the true penitent's contrition, deep humility and conscious vileness—yet it is also expressive of the boldness of faith, the confidence of love, and the courage of self-despair. This is not the resolution of a mere formal devotee, of one satisfied with a mere external service, with cold and distant addresses to God. The true worshipper must come "even to his seat."

And what is his errand there? "I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments." The sinner's cause is bad, but not desperate. We have sinned, but we may, we will approach the Father of Mercies, with holy humility, freedom, and confidence, for "we

have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;" and he is the propitiation for our sins. In his name, therefore, let us come to our heavenly Father—"even to his seat"—and we may "ask what we will, and it shall be done unto us."

The arguments which Job would use, were no doubt suited to his case, and such as applied to the object he had in view. All the blessings we can ask in prayer, or, as guilty sinners, we stand in need of, from God, are the purchase of the Redeemer's death, and the fruit of his intercession. Let us plead these at the throne of the Majesty on High, and our argument will have force, and our plea will prove successful. Do we want the *pardon of sin*? let us plead the virtue and sufficiency of the blood of atonement to cleanse from all sin, and the promise, that "none who come to Christ shall be denied;" let us look to him who "hath finished transgression, made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness." Do we, under the pangs of a guilty conscience, or under the sense of the curse of a broken law, and the anger of a holy God, long for deliverance from that curse, for peace of conscience, and joy in the favour and love of God; then let us plead the fulness and freeness of Christ's redemption, as fitted to deliver the conscience from slavish fear, and to awaken in the soul the love of Christ, as the powerful spring of all true obedience. If brought into despondency or despair by harassing afflictions, or mental fears, the effects of departure from God, let not the backslider discredit or mistrust God's faithfulness or gracious promises, "I will heal their backsliding, and I will love them freely." "I do earnestly remember him still," but let him without delay exert the little life that remains, and cry, "Oh that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat! The honour and glory of God, as seen in the cross of Jesus, are arguments so powerful, that no trembling sinner ever used them in vain. Plead the fulfilment of all the conditions of the Covenant of Grace; plead your own individual interest in the blessings of that well-ordered and sure covenant; plead the merits of Christ's righteousness, and the efficacy of his blood, and the Father will assuredly satisfy you with his goodness, enrich you with his grace, and give you the spirit of adoption, enabling you to cry, Abba, Father.

#### IV. The text is the language of *hope*.

How little hope did Job entertain or expect from his earthly friends. They proved indeed "miserable comforters," "physicians of no value." His own heart "knew its bitterness," but none among them could sympathize with him, or afford him relief. All his hopes flowed from another—an Almighty friend, ver. 6. Blessed hope! that keeps the

soul from sinking into despair, and into hell itself. Hope in God has "strengthened" the believer "with strength in his soul," and enabled him to say, "Why art thou cast down, oh! my soul, and why art thou disquieted in me." Hope thou in God.

This hope in God is as the anchor of the soul, sure and stedfast; entering into that within the veil, whither the forerunner is for us entered—even Jesus. With what confidence may the trembling soul come, "even to God's seat," order his cause, and plead his arguments, when it rests on the word of promise, and on the inviolable faithfulness of Jehovah, and on the complete atonement, and all-prevalent intercession of his Son and our Saviour. If we come thus, we will not come in vain, and it will not be long before the saint thus longing and looking for an absent Lord, will have reason to join in the song of the Church of old, "I have found him whom my soul loveth." Hope is soon turned into positive enjoyment. Those who thus wait on God, and hope in his word, will not be disappointed. Though "they walk in darkness, and have no light, yet let them trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon their God." "Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily," "thy light shall rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon-day." Isa. lviii. 8.

O! trembling afflicted disciple, be no longer then faithless, but believing. God is not far away from any of us. Nay, he is more willing to receive you, than you are to come to him. Cast away all unworthy doubts and suspicions regarding a gracious God, and "say not in thine heart, who shall ascend into heaven, to bring Christ down from above; or who shall descend into the deep, to bring Christ again from the dead. For the word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thine heart, the word of faith" revealed in the gospel. Surely it cannot be for lack of knowledge where he is to be found, so much as for want of will to go to him, that you have not already found him. For he "waits to be gracious" to every troubled soul, and "never said, to any of the seed of Jacob, Seek me in vain."

Are you labouring under heavy and sore afflictions, making "bitter complaints," and feeling the "stroke" with which you are visited "heavier than your groaning?" Oh! beware of giving way to a rebellious spirit, as if God were chastening you beyond your deserts. You cannot discover the reasons of his dealings and dispensations *now*, so full of bitterness to your soul, but ere long light will spring out of all this darkness, sweet communion out of the lamented absence of his presence, joy out of deepest grief. A new song will be put into your mouth of praise and thanksgiving, and you will be enabled to say,

“He hath led me by a right way unto the city of habitation.” God’s providences may for a time seem to run counter to his promises, and for a season “his great power” may seem to be arrayed against you; but he will make you to “understand the reason and purposes of his dispensations towards you, when *love* to you, and the advancement of his own glory, will be discovered as the springs and motives of all his dealings.

Give not way to languor in your affections, coldness in your desires, indifference as to the Lord’s presence or absence, and feebleness of faith, but stir up your languid graces, and anew return to God with all your heart, and he will make your light spring up as the noon-day, for at evening time it shall be light. Let the desires of your soul be like David’s, “panting for God,” “When shall I come and appear before God,” or like Job, “Oh that I knew where I might find him;” and you will soon be able to say with the spouse, after mourning the absence of her “beloved,” “It was but a little ere I found him whom my soul loveth, I held him and would not let him go.”



## LECTURE XXVIII.

THE TRIAL AND TRIUMPH AND REWARD OF FAITH.

BY THE REV. GEORGE LEWIS, DUNDEE.

“And it came to pass after these things that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt-offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him. Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you. And Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together. And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son; and he said, Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering. And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt-offering: so they went both of them together. And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham. Abraham: he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and beheld behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt-offering in the stead of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen. And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, and said, By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies: and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed: because thou hast obeyed my voice. So Abraham returned unto his young men, and they rose up and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham dwelt at Beersheba.”—GEN. xxii. 1-19.

“By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whether he went. By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son; of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy seed be called. Accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.”—HEB. xi. 8, 17-19.

THIS is not the first occasion on which God did tempt, or, as it means, try Abraham.

The call to leave his country, and kindred, and father's house, to go to a land that he would show him, was his first trial, and that call he promptly obeyed, not knowing whither he went.

It was another trial of his faith to promise him the land of Canaan to his seed, yet to keep him all his life a wanderer, giving him no inheritance, no, not so much as to set his foot on: where his descendants were to have all, to grant him nothing but promises. Yea, he must purchase a grave for his Sarah in the land where his descendants

were to be numerous as the stars of heaven, and as the sands on the sea-shore.

It was a still more severe trial of the patriarch's faith, to give him the promise of great posterity while he was yet childless. To promise him a son and heir, through whom the promise of a numerous posterity was to be begun to be realised ; yet, though seventy years old, to delay its fulfilment. To renew from time to time this promise ; yet still to defer its accomplishment. To suffer the patriarch to grow old, while it still remained unfulfilled ; and, only after *twenty* years of hope deferred, of anxiety and solicitude, when the hopes of nature had died away, to grant at length only the first pledge and earnest of all his promises.

But the promise of a son so long deferred and at length fulfilled, is fulfilled only to be again made the subject of a trial of faith more stern and severe than aught he had yet passed through, conveyed in the command, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and offer him for a burnt-offering on a mountain that I will tell thee of." In these words there is no hiding of a dark deed in darker words, no softening or concealing the terrible nature of the act of faith to which he is called—all the circumstances that most endeared Isaac, are fully expressed. "His son," "his only son," "his Isaac," "whom he loved," is to be the victim, and himself the executioner. Isaac was not only the child of many prayers and promises, of prayers offered up through twenty long years, and promises often renewed and still delayed. To twenty years of hope deferred, had now been added twenty years of fond and endeared possession. Isaac was now advancing to manhood, and had been spared long enough to his father to have become the object of his deepest, as well as his tenderest affection. But not only, as a parent, were all his feelings bound up in his son ; his hopes as a believer centred in Isaac. All the promises of God, as well as his own natural affections, were bound up in the same bundle with the lad's life. Isaac was a link in the chain of events, for the fulfilment of which the truth of God was pledged. His birth had been a step in the accomplishment of those promises of a numerous posterity that should possess Canaan, and in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed. Yet, despite of all these accumulated circumstances, which set in array against this strange command all the feelings of the man and the parent, and even the hopes of the believer, such was the unshaken confidence of the patriarch in the power and faithfulness of God, that he rises up early in the morning and prepares to obey.

Nothing is more characteristic of a great and decided character, acting upon clear views and strong feelings of duty, than the prompt obedience

of the Patriarch. Here is no appearance of hesitation—no consultation with friends—no hint of any communication even with the mother of Isaac. The morning in which he receives the command, he obeys. To have hesitated in such a case, would indeed only have been gaining time to render obedience more difficult, perhaps impossible. His wife, his household, even his bond-servants, might have arisen and delivered Isaac by persuasion or by force.

In a command so plain, to have delayed even for the sake of deliberation, would have argued the want of strong faith, and the delay might have altogether unmanned him. Those around would have discovered in his strange and altered demeanour that something lay heavy at his heart—his looks of abstraction, his ill-disguised sorrow and anguish—the troubles of a mind disturbed by contending feelings, and working in the looks and gestures of one at other times of a firm and constant spirit, would have betrayed the inward secret of his soul. But even could he have succeeded in disguising his feelings, yet never would his obligations to obey God have appeared clearer and more forcible, by plunging into the depths of his own troubled spirit. He might have sat, like Job, seven days and seven nights upon the ground, musing upon the strange command, but the more he thought upon it, the more he would be perplexed. Not all the wise men in the East could have helped the Patriarch to clearer views of the part which, as a good man, he ought to act. Never would his sentiments have been more just, or his resolutions stronger, than at the very moment of receiving the command.

But though Abraham instantly obeyed, yet it was the third day ere he lifted up his eyes and saw the place afar off, where Isaac was to be offered.\* Here is another remarkable circumstance in this trial of faith.

Let no one say that he acted rashly and precipitately, under some sudden and uncontrollable impulse. The long journey of three days to the Mount sufficiently proves that he proceeded to his purpose with a full view of the nature of the action, and a calm and settled conviction of duty; and though his resolution was instantly taken, it was not taken in ignorance or under any delusion.

The interval between the first conception and the final execution of a terrible act of duty, is the severest probation to which the human heart can be put. During the hours and days that elapse, the mind can find no resting-place on any but the all-absorbing subject; or if diverted for a little, it is only to return with greater violence and intensity. The interval is as a dark and troubled dream, in which the mind, so far from gaining in calmness, determination, and energy, becomes only the more confused and unsettled. The anticipation becomes many times worse than the reality, and instead of only once suffering the evils to which we

look forward, we suffer them many times in the imagination of unreal terrors.

During the three days that elapsed between the issuing of the Divine command and its final execution, Abraham journeyed with his son by his side. He looked on his son as one under sentence of death, and himself the appointed executioner of the sentence. He listened to his innocent conversation, which betrayed a profound ignorance of the real objects of the journey. He beheld his unsuspecting countenance, which pleaded strongly against the deed. Every step only seemed to present the motives to disobedience more strongly before the patriarch's mind, to raise more doubts and difficulties, and, if possible, to overthrow his first resolutions. It must have been truly a silent and solemn journey in which but *one* subject could occupy the father's mind, but *one* feeling fill his heart. Yet the Patriarch bore up throughout this dreary interval. No temptation, no delay, could shake his constant soul. He never swerves, and, on the *third* day, as on the first, is still ready to obey.

Having seen the place of sacrifice afar off, Abraham left the young men, and, accompanied by Isaac, who bore the wood for the sacrifice—a lively type of our blessed Redeemer bearing his cross—he proceeded to the appointed spot. Nothing could be more affecting, nothing more trying to Abraham, than the brief conversation which now ensues between the Father and the son; ver. 7, 8, “And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father; and he said, Here am I, my son; and he said, Behold the *fire* and the *wood*, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering?” This simple and natural question was fitted to revive the struggle of parental affection, and to throw fresh obstacles in the way of obedience. A full heart requires only a drop more to overflow; and if anything could at that moment bring a gush of inexpressible tenderness into the patriarch's heart, it was the simple and unsuspecting question of the victim, “My father, where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”

On the last scene of Abraham's trial, when he came to lay his son upon the altar, and to bind him as the victim to be offered, the sacred historian is brief and reserved—indulges no sentiment, and gives us no picture of parental grief and agony. Such is the perfect delicacy of the sacred narrative, that there is no exhibition of the patriarch engaged in this last scene of his trial—no description of the struggles of parental affection and severe duty. Still less is said of Isaac's wondrous submission, though of age to have successfully resisted—a submission not less wonderful than his father's. The fact is stated—nothing more—and left to our general conceptions.

“Abraham built an altar to the Lord, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood; and Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.”

Abraham had now done enough. The strongest temptation had assailed him in vain. He preferred obeying God to every earthly consideration. By his obedience, his faith was justified. In leaving his country and kindred at the Divine call, he showed a strong faith. In continuing so many years to hope, even against hope, for the fulfilment of the promise of a son, he showed that no time nor delay could extinguish his trust in God. But in this surrender of his only son—his beloved Isaac—his faith rose above the stature of the sons of men.

God delights not in bloody rites, but in the offering of faith. He desired not the patriarch's son, but the patriarch's heart, and he has got it. The hand of Abraham is therefore stayed in the act. The angel Jehovah appeared out of heaven, and said, “Abraham, Abraham; and he said, here am I. And he said, lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him; for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me.”

Let us now enquire into the nature of that faith, and of those hopes which carried the patriarch through this trial.

Turn to Heb. xi. 17, “By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac, accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead.”

God had promised, “That in Isaac his seed would be called.” Gen. xxi. 12. It was hard, indeed, to reconcile the singular command to offer up Isaac with this promise. They seemed totally irreconcilable—as opposite as life and death; but the veracity of God was not to be shaken by the impossibilities of men. The command seemed naturally to annihilate all hope through Isaac, yet Abraham hoped, even against hope. As before, in looking at the Divine promise of a son, he regarded not his old age; so now, in looking at the promise, that in Isaac, this very Isaac, his seed would be called, and that in him all the nations of the earth should be blessed, he regarded not the natural improbability of its being through a son, whom he was commanded to put to death; but with a firm heart obeyed the Divine command, believing that to God it was not impossible to raise even the dead. This accounts for the declaration of Abraham to his servants, verse 5, “Abide ye here with the ass, and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.” He believed that he would return again to the young men, accompanied by his son, and therefore there was no prevarication in saying so; on the contrary, it was the calm expression of his assured faith that his son, though put to death, would come alive again. Had it

not been said, that in Isaac his seed would be called, then Abraham might have looked for another Isaac in his 'age, in whom the promise would be realized ; but the specific promise, " in Isaac," this very Isaac, pledged the truth and faithfulness of God, and rendered it impossible for Abraham to despair of his son's resurrection, without quitting his hold on all the Divine promises of a Saviour, bound up, as they were, in the same bundle of life. Abraham looked to the promise, and there he saw plainly recorded, Isaac among *the living* ; he looked to the command, and there he saw as plainly recorded, *Isaac amongst the dead*. God could not lie ; yet neither could a dead man be the progenitor of the promised Messiah, the hope of all nations, and the glory of his people Israel. Was Isaac, then, to be slain—his blood poured around the altar—his body given to the flames—and its elements scattered to the four winds—nothing remaining, save the ashes of the altar ? Yes ! But Abraham could look at death undismayed, because of his hope of the resurrection of his beloved Isaac that was to follow. He who gave him a living son, could and would restore to him a living son—gather from the air, the fire, and the earth, his remains, and present him anew with his very Isaac, raised up, and re-embodied from the ashes of the altar.

Let us learn, from the nature of Abraham's faith and hopes, the faith and hopes that should animate every true believer.

To see no way within the range of our experience, in which the promises of God can be fulfilled, yet to believe that God will certainly fulfil them in his own way, and in his own time, is the character of genuine trust in God.

A child is led by its parents into a workman's shop—he is shown a rude block of wood or iron, and told that out of it will be formed a curious piece of work. He believes, though he knows nothing whatever of the skill by which so great a change will be effected ; and on returning, after many days, finds the shapeless mass converted into a beautiful and useful invention.

At another time, the same child is led into a garden, and shown a small seed, and told that from it will spring a majestic tree, in which the birds of the air may lodge. He believes this also, though neither he nor his instructors can tell the secret of vegetable life, or explain the wonders of vegetable expansion.

But, to draw the parallel still closer to the Christian.

There are not a few of our race born blind, shut out for ever from the attainment of knowledge by one source, and that the greatest. The man born blind, is led by the hand of affection to enjoy the rays of that summer sun which he can never behold. He is told, that the source of that genial warmth, which he feels is not only

infinitely greater than the household fire by which he spends the winter, but that it is the greatest and most glorious of all created objects—at whose return every living creature rejoices, and in whose absence creation is a universal blank. What notions can the man born blind form of these wonders? What idea can he have, after all our explanations of the glories of the firmament? How many contradictions and impossibilities will suggest themselves to his limited imagination, did he give way to his own independent speculations? But the blind believe in those that see as children in their parents, and leaning upon the superior endowments of their fellows, are introduced by faith into the world of sight.

Similar, but a Divine gift, is the faith that realizes things spiritual and eternal. Having settled in our minds that the Bible is truth without mixture of error, having God for its author, and salvation for its end, we go to that Word, and there finding it declared that God in very deed dwelt amongst men; that the Divine was united to the human nature in the person of Jesus Christ; that Christ lived on earth as never man lived, taught as never man taught, and died as never man died, *a sacrifice for sin*; we refuse not faith in this mystery until God lay before us the result of that mysterious union of God and man, which is the ground and pillar of gospel truth; but knowing that we are reading the Divine Word, and receiving intelligence of things above and beyond the sphere of our knowledge, we think it not more reasonable in the child to learn in silent reverence of its parents, or in the blind man to be taught of the seeing, than in short-sighted man to learn in reverence of his Maker. We accept the intelligence of "*God manifest in the flesh*" with a joyful heart, and upon this only sure foundation, build for eternity.

So the believer in affliction goes to his Bible, and there he finds it recorded, that "whom God loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." That he chuses his people in the furnace, and keeps them there until he has proved and refined them, opened their ear to instruction, subdued their pride and obstinacy, made them to know themselves, and delivered them from the bondage of many an old and rooted sin. On these promises the afflicted soul fastens, and though we may not presently see our need of this affliction, yet, believing that all is in the hand of infinite goodness and wisdom, we are enabled to count our afflictions light by weighing them in the scales of eternity; yea, to take comfort, and in patience to possess our souls in the full assurance that all is well and wisely arranged, and that the day of adversity is set over against the day of prosperity, that the believer may be wanting in nothing to fit and prepare him for his eternal home.

Again, the Christian goes to the Scriptures, and there he finds it recorded, that after death cometh the resurrection of the dead, when all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of Man. What though he cannot conceive how, after the dissolution of all its parts, the materials of his body shall be again reassembled and fashioned into the bones, and sinews, and complex framework of a man ! What though to him it be a perfect mystery how the dry bones shall be again made to live, again covered with flesh, again present the features of breathing, health, and beauty—again be the abode of the rational and sentient soul ! Yet he firmly believes that “his Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand on the latter day on the earth, and though worms destroy his body, yet in his flesh shall he see God. He shall see him for himself, and his eyes shall behold him and not another.”

What so improbable to the eye of sense, as that the friend we convey in sorrow to the silence of the grave, whose portion seems for ever to be darkness and desolation, who is soon lost to memory as to sight, and whose place on earth shall quickly become unknown—will yet awake from his long sleep of ages, and be again a living, thinking, and immortal being ! Yet this is what Abraham believed, though he saw not how the dead body of his beloved son could be again re-animated. This is what the dying believer firmly relies upon, what the infirmities of age only strengthens ; and though the outward man perish, day by day, yet, amidst the sinking of nature he cherishes a hope full of immortality. Not so certainly will the workman shape his rude block of wood into a beautiful cabinet, or nature out of a small seed rear a spreading tree, or the dark and putrid soil, after the cold and torpor of winter, give forth the beauties of spring, and the abundance of harvest—as God will cause our dead bones to live, reunite our souls to our bodies, and death shall be followed by the resurrection from the dead and a glorious immortality. Let us not then stagger at any of the doctrines or promises of God, however improbable. While the man of the world says what I see I believe, it is ours to believe though we see not ; yea, to believe in *Him*, whom having not seen we yet love. The man of the world cries—

Live while you live,  
And seize the pleasures of the present day ;  
Live while you live, the sacred prophet cries,  
And give to God each moment as it flies.

The man of the world exclaims—While I live there is hope. The dying believer exclaims—Dying I have hope ; yea, the day of death is my birth-day to immortality.

Once more, let us consider the reward of Abraham's faith.



The sacrifice of Isaac was something more than the trial of Abraham's faith. To Abraham and to all the world of ancient believers, it was a picture of coming events. Every part of the transaction, from the morning on which he arose until the moment when he offered up the ram caught in the thicket—the substitute for his Isaac—presents some feature of the great sacrifice for sin, some part of the work of redeeming love. Abraham represented God the Father, who 2000 years after gave his beloved Son a sacrifice for sin, and Isaac, the Son of God, who willingly surrendered himself to become the substitute and sin-offering for the guilty. The three days of that journey in which Abraham looked on his son as one under sentence of death, represented the three days during which our Saviour was under the power of the grave. The altar on which Isaac was laid, represented the cross, the fire and the knife set forth the justice of God due to our sins, until the moment when Isaac, about to become a perfect type of Christ, by the shedding of his blood, the type changed, and Isaac, delivered from his bonds; the ram substituted in his stead, became the type of Christ, and Isaac, of the sinner set free. Behold then a heart-affecting picture presented on Moriah's top to the eye of faith of a suffering Redeemer! Here, in the words of our Lord, Abraham saw "my day afar off, and rejoiced." He learned to look through Isaac to Christ, and Moriah became a ladder to mount to heaven, a telescope to bring his Saviour very near to his soul. On Abraham and Isaac's heart were engraved deeper than before the hopes of a coming Saviour, and thenceforth they became more than ever waiters for the salvation of their Saviour God. Abraham to his dying hour would delight to converse with his son of that wondrous type, and the greater wonders that it not only foretold but foreshewed; and ere he descended the Mount, he received anew the spiritual promise of Christ, "In thee shall the families of the earth be blessed."

For the confirmation of our faith, on whom the latter days of the Church are come, these things are recorded, that in this typical action we may learn not only the nature of saving faith, but behold with livelier hearts the great object of saving faith, the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world, set forth from the beginning as the only Saviour. These things also teach us that whom God calls to sacrifice and self-denial for his sake, in the act of self-sacrifice they will get a nearer and a dearer sight of Christ. Him that was afar off by reason of faith's weakness, will in the day of trial be brought near; for never yet did God call any of his people to fight with some lion of a temptation, or endure some lion-like trial, but he found, as John Bunyan says, "honey in the carcase of the dead lion."

## LECTURE XXIX.

THE LEPER DRAWING FORTH THE SAVIOUR'S GRACE.

BY THE REV. ANDREW A. BONAR, COLLACE.

"And there came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand and touched him, and saith unto him, I will, be thou clean. And as soong as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him and he was cleansed. And he straitly charged him, and forthwith sent him away, and saith unto him, see th u say nothing to any man; but go thy way, show thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them. But he went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places. And they came to him from every quarter.—MARK i. 40-45.

OUR Lord was at this time sowing the seed of the kingdom in Galilee, visiting its towns and its villages. In the midst of a country village, or at the market-place of a larger town, he often stood among the people; the true Wisdom lifted up her voice (Prov. viii. 1, 3), proclaiming life to the sons of men.

On one of these occasions he was met by a leper; or rather, it seems, he was interrupted by the unexpected visit of a man all white with leprosy. The Evangelist Luke (v. 12) speaks of the occurrence as taking place in one of the towns. If so, the case was altogether remarkable; for, according to the ancient law that shut out the leper from the camp, no one in that state was allowed to enter the gates of any city. Like the four unhappy men (2 Kings vii. 3), the leprous person might come up to the gate, but must not enter. In the case before us, however, the man's misery and earnestness appear to have led to a perilous experiment. Persuaded of the Lord's power to heal, longing to to put it to the test, almost sure, also, from rumours that had gone abroad, that his willingness might embrace such a case as his, the man will venture to do this new thing—he will come in all his leprosy into the city! He will rush along, and ere ever the angry people have had time to recover from their astonishment at the boldness of the leprous man, he hopes to find himself cured and whole at the feet of Jesus. There was both daring and doubting in his action. He is like Esther venturing into the presence of the king, "If I perish, I perish."

What a lively picture of a soul awakened to true anxiety for salvation! O to see many such in our day! O to see the "kingdom of heaven thus taken by violence."

The earnestness of the man is seen yet farther in his manner. He "knelt" before the Lord, and next "fell on his face" (Luke v. 12); his attitudes giving emphasis to his words. Even as our Master himself, when clothed with our leprosy, in the garden of Gethsemane, first fell on his knees before his Father, and then prostrate on his face as his agony increased.

He "besought" Jesus — he addressed moving cries to him, and this was the burden of them all, "IF THOU WILT, THOU CANST MAKE ME CLEAN!" He has some fear, some doubt, some secret dread lest the Lord should see reasons for withholding the exercise of his power; but still he has great faith. He does not, like Martha, consider Christ's power as needing to be sought from God (John xi. 22); he believes the power to be lodged already in Christ's person; he believes, too, it is power so great, that it can reach his case. Yet, let it be remembered, up to this time, there had not occurred any case of *leprosy cured*. As yet, Jesus had not, so far as is recorded, healed any such. History, however, told of Namaan healed by miracle; and this man does not doubt but Jesus can work this miracle, if he will.

Brethren, if this man reasoned thus in himself, "though Jesus has never yet done so great a thing as the cleansing of a leper, yet he has done enough to convince me that he can, if he will"—surely much more may every soul here say, "if Jesus has saved souls as guilty as mine, then surely he can save me."

There was in this leper's case an unhappy dimness of vision as to the Saviour's grace. "Whether or not he has a heart that will go the length of taking up the case of one so unholy as I am, I know not"—this was the man's lingering suspicion. But the Lord Jesus had so much grace in his heart toward sinners, that, in spite of his doubt, he took up the man's case at once. "*Moved with compassion, he put forth his hand.*" The word is, "his bowels yearning, he put forth his hand." It is remarkable how often we are told of our Master's compassion. In Matthew xv. 32, at the sight of the multitude; in Matthew xx. 34, looking at the blind men in vain rolling their eyeballs to find the sun; in Luke ix. 13, when he met the weeping widow of Nain at the gate. All who knew Jesus, knew and felt that he had bowels of mercies, and in this they could not fail to recognise the very character of Jehovah; "the multitude of whose tender mercies" (Psalm li. 1), were the theme of David's song, and the hope of David's heart.

Jesus "*put out his hand and touched him.*" He *touched the leper.* He was not afraid of being contaminated; he knew that no pollution would come from the man to him, but that, on the contrary, healing would go from him to the man. Christ is the fountain that cleanses others, and is itself never polluted. Christ can let John lean on his bosom, and in so doing can convey purity to John, while John communicates no stain to his Master. Though Jesus touched the leper, he did not, in so doing, break the Mosaic law; for the law forbade any contact with the defiled, only on the understanding that this contact would spread the defilement. But Christ's touch removed it, instead of receiving its contagion. Even as he ate with publicans and sinners, and yet broke no law of God; for he did so in order to draw them forth from their miry clay.

Jesus saith unto him, "*I will, be thou cleansed.*" Our Master is as willing as he is able. He exhibits both qualities here in equal degree, and at one moment. It is with Divine brevity that he expresses himself, in the very style of him who could say, "Let there be light." But there is infinite fulness revealed by these simple words; for herein we see the *heart* and the *hand* of "God manifest in flesh," and find that the depth of his grace and the extent of his power are alike unsearchable.

"*And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed.*" Here again is the finger of God. How characteristic of Godhead is this *immediate* effect! "He speaks, and it is done." Nothing is a barrier to the Lord's will and power. And hence it is that *in pardon of sin* the stamp of the Divine character is plainly seen in the sinner being at *once and completely* forgiven. A gradual pardon, or an incomplete pardon, would want altogether the mark and impress of a Divine original.

Our Lord then "*straitly charged him*" *i. e.* with authority, in the tone of the Lawgiver—he charged the man as to his future conduct—he bade him tell none of his cure. "*Say nothing to any man.*" Some people's own soul is greatly injured by their telling others what they have experienced. Pride is often fed by this habit of speaking about themselves, and the individuals are drawn off from personal application. Neither this, nor any other passage, discountenances a believing man telling what God has done for his soul, if, by so doing, others are to be blessed, and God glorified. But this, and many other passages, guard us against the abuse of this matter. In the case of Jairus' daughter (v. 43), the parents were not to tell the miracle, probably in order to punish Capernaum's unbelief, and the previous scorn of the multitude. In the case of the transfiguration, the three disciples were "to tell no man

till Christ was risen from the dead," because, until then, the time was not suitable for revealing that special wonder. In another case (Matt. xvi. 20), the disciples were not to tell that "Jesus was the Christ," because at that time they were unfit to teach others regarding him, ignorant as they were of the necessity of his death.

In the case before us, the man<sup>1</sup> may have been charged to be silent only till he had visited the priest; and this visit was according to the law of Moses regarding leprosy. By that law, as laid down in Levit. xiv. 2-32, the priest was publicly to proclaim the leper's cleansing; and in so doing in the present case, a "*testimony*" would be borne to the reality of Christ's wondrous works. And then the mode in which the cleansing was made known was well fitted to send back the cleansed man's thoughts to the Saviour. For the ceremonial rite observed in pronouncing one clean, was sprinkling him with blood of a *bird killed* over running water. This blood was dropt on the man from a *living bird*, that had been dipt therein, and that was let loose to fly at liberty. Our Lord, no doubt, loved that type well, for it so fully spoke of himself as the *dying* and yet *the living* one—his death and resurrection.

The leper did not obey the command. In this he sinned. No doubt it might seem excusable to man for one so benefited to blaze abroad his benefactor's kindness. Men might say it was pardonable zeal. But ill-timed and too forward zeal may be real sin. The man really, by so doing, misrepresented Christ, saying, in a manner, "The Lord was not sincere in his charge; it was affected modesty." O what a reproach to cast upon the uprightness of him whose love "vaunted not itself, and was not puffed up." And besides, by his mistaken zeal, he hindered Christ's public work, "*insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city.*" Brethren, let the law of Christ direct us, while the love of Christ constrains us.

And now let us fix our attention on two important views of our Lord which are both illustrated by this narrative.

### I. *The reality of Christ's sympathy in our sorrows.*

There is real and intense pity for human misery in the heart of Jesus. It only waits for an occasion to shew itself. The leper's affliction gave such an opportunity. His beseeching cry touches the spring, and the door flies open. He rolls the stone from the well's mouth, and lets us see how deep and cool are the waters. He breaks the box of spikenard, and diffuses the fragrance on us. Blessed day in which this man probed the heart of our compassionate High Priest!

What, then, is there in Christ's heart? There is love to the needy, and tender pity to the helpless, sympathy for the sorrowful, and bowels of

mercies for the miserable. This man came rushing into his presence in haste; his fellow-men shrank back from his touch, and ran aside at his approach. He kneels, falls prostrate, beseeches, spreads out his snow white hands, lifts up his sunk eye, draws attention to the disease that has made his whole person loathsome, and utters an imploring cry, "*Lord, if thou wilt thou canst!*" I am driven off all shores now—is there a haven for me in Thee?

The sight and the appeal moved Jesus. See how he feels for misery. He feels for the tears of the distressed who have no comforter. He often bends his ear to the prison-door to hear the groaning of the prisoner. He listens, and yearns over the moans of a sick-bed. He pities deeply the sorrows of awakened souls. And his people's every affliction is felt by him. At this hour, Jesus has all this fellow-feeling; for it is still as true as ever, "We have not an High Priest that cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities." (Heb. iv. 15.) We should never read the gospel history, brethren, without remembering that most precious verse, "*Jesus Christ the same, yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.*" (Heb. xiii. 8.) "*Yesterday,*" he was in Galilee healing the leper; and you see his heart then "*To-day,*" he is at the Father's right hand; and you see his heart still. Yet a little while, and he shall come the second time to them that wait for him; and you learn what to expect of him on that day—"the same for ever."

This compassion was called forth into exercise—brought out in acts—by misery being laid before him. As when they laid the palsied man, silently, at his feet. As when at Nain he saw the widow's tears. As at Bethany "when he saw Mary weeping." Therefore let us lay before him our distress and trouble. Let us open out our wounds in the physician's presence, "Lord, here is my sore;" and, "Lord, here is my perpetual pain, and my incurable wound." Do this by special, particular, minute, confession of sin; or by definite and full declaration of sorrows. It is thus you draw off the bandage and shew the ghastly sore, and move the pity, and draw forth the skill of Jesus. You may object: "*Of what use in our doing so? He knows our sorrows already?*" True; but our High Priest—our brother—uses human rules, so to speak, in this matter. It was his own way on earth; he unbosomed all he felt to his Father, and he desires us to do the same.

It is not because he is slow to feel. No; he is easily touched. The leper's case is stated, and "*immediately he puts forth his hand.*" Peter begins to sink in the water; and forthwith Jesus stretches out his hand. Jairus tells the sorrows of a father's heart; and scarcely has he got to the end of his tale, ere Jesus arises and goes with him. All this shews that he has a full heart of tender pity. He is, indeed, far, far more

easily moved than we; just because no sin ever blunts his feelings, or introduces selfish regard into his calculations. His holy, loving soul hastens to relieve a suppliant's pain.

Some never really shew Christ their disease—their sorrow—their wretchedness. Chagrin, or the sorrow of the world, works their ruin. O unhappy one, whom the world hath deceived, and who feedest proudly on thy very wretchedness, unbosom all to our High Priest, and find his flowing compassion thy cure. O suffering ones, try these deep compassions. "As one whom his mother comforteth, so the Lord thy God would comfort thee." It is thus that his own have always been upheld and refreshed. Such is the character of Him who is our physician.

## II. *The manner in which Christ heals our souls' diseases.*

Very many narratives in Scripture appear to have been inserted there because of their peculiar fitness to illustrate spiritual truth and the ways of God. Thus David's cave of Adullam; and David's interview with Mephibosheth, whom he pardoned for Jonathan's sake; and the Queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon; and Jeremiah's drawn up from the miry clay of his dungeon. But especially may we say this of a narrative like this before us, wherein the disease is *leprosy*, which all agree is remarkably typical of *sin*, and wherein the healer is *Jesus*. We have no doubt this man's case was meant to teach us the sinner's mode of coming to the Saviour for pardon.

Keeping in mind, then, that *leprosy* shewed the nature of *sin*, here is represented a sinner of the most loathsome kind, laden with deadly sin, from head to foot polluted. Feeling and thoughts, words and actions, have all been evil, and only evil. Next, there is here represented this great sinner sensible of his case, awakened to deep concern under it. Nature awakens concern in the diseased for a cure, and leads him to a physician; and the Holy Spirit awakens concern in the sinner, and turns his joy into mourning until he has found a remedy, directing him where to go, and opening his heart to embrace the Saviour revealed to him. Now here are such a man's difficulties in seeking the Saviour; here are exhibited such a man's enquiries when he has come so far as to feel that he must find a Saviour or perish. Here is that man's case set before us in the anxious moments he spends ere the scales have for ever fallen from his eyes, and the fulness of the grace of a forgiving God been discovered.

The man comes to none other but the Lord Jesus. And what was *the warrant* that emboldened him so to come? All the warrant lay in the *Lord himself*, what he had heard of his works, and what he knew of his character. And such is our warrant for coming as sinners, as ungodly, as lost, as unjust, as unclean, as desperately wicked, to the Lord our Righteous-

ness. We find nothing in our own hearts or lives to warrant a single hope; but we hear of the Lord, that "they who know his name, put their trust in him." We hear that there is boldness found by "*the blood of Jesus*, and by the fact that himself also is "*the High Priest over the house of God*"—and so his work and his living person put into our hands an ample warrant for a bold approach.

This warrant, when held even by a trembling hand, avails—Christ's work and person, seen even by a dim eye—the blood and the High Priest, alone trusted in even by a fearful heart, bring us into the Lord's presence, and within touch of the golden sceptre. The leper's heart had still a lingering suspicion, "*If thou wilt*;" but then it did at the same time repose confidence on him so far as it knew his mind. He did believe the fountain to be deep and wide, able to give out much; and approaching it thus, he was made by the Lord to know to his blessed astonishment, that not only was it deep and full, but *full to the very brim*. Jesus at once hastened to say, "*I will; be clean*," putting the man at the very edge of the fountain, and laving him with its waters.

We sometimes think that we believe Jesus able to pardon and save, but we are not sure that he is willing to go so far as to save *us*. For the lurking suspicion in such cases is, that there is about us an unworthiness that will in all likelihood repel him from us. But this is a misunderstanding, a gross misconception of Christ's reasons for saving any. His *grace* is misrepresented by such a thought; and did we see how he pardons solely *for reasons in himself, not for any cause in us*, we would be delivered from this hinderance. Jesus here removes this very fear; for so great is his grace, that even doubts of himself are swept away by it.

Nor is there any *price* paid for pardon, even as the leper's case was all free. He came to get; he never once thought of offering a gift in any shape. It was well known that Jesus did all his wonders without inducement on the part of the receivers. The man went feeling, "He gives, and I need to get." And so it was, Christ gave, and the leper received—not a word of conditions, not a word even as to duty, until the case was perfected. And thus it is with *pardon of sin*. The coming sinner's appeal to Christ—his simple confidence in him for pardon—is responded to by an *immediate bestowal of forgiveness*. The Lord has not to go and fetch the gift; nor has he to bid the applicant go and return again; or go and abide many days in patient hope. The pardon is in Christ, who at once says, "I will." But perhaps you object, "But there is something like a price, for we must have *faith* in him?" But is this a price? Was the leper's coming to Christ a price? In fact, *faith*, so far from being a price, is *the soul's believing that it is saved without a price*.



You may say that you have often tried to get to Christ, and have often prayed. Well, but all the time you may have never searched *his heart*. You may have thought of "*Thou canst*," but very little of "*I will*." You are still a stranger to the joy of believing his present readiness, and his present power. You have not been aware, that instead of bringing a price to him—*e.g.* excited feelings, bitter repentance, humiliation—he has on his part been ready all along to give an immediate pardon, whenever he saw it could be done in a way honourable to himself,—that is, you were content to receive it without a single qualification on your part at all.

Brethren, who of you is this day as the leper? The fear of man has no influence on you now to keep you back; you could face a whole city in your search for a cure. But you have still some unsatisfied doubts. These doubts are no honour to Christ; they are no blessing to yourself. The Holy Spirit, in savingly revealing Christ to any soul, removes them altogether. A Saviour better known would satisfy them. Though no case so bad, or at least so peculiar as yours, had ever occurred before, yet he can reach it with his holy skill. The sinner that believes "*Thou canst*," might surely look a little farther and see that also written on his heart, "*I will*." Survey his person. See the priest's robe, the priest's girdle, the priest's mitre, the priest's breast-plate, with its row of names, each name telling of a man of Israel, to whom the Prince and Saviour gave repentance and remission. See the palms of his hands, on which are engraven the names of Rahab and Manasseh, and thousand, thousand lepers cleansed and glorified. To such a Saviour you may go: go even with doubts; for you may go to hide them all in his pierced side, as Thomas did. Carry doubts, which form so great a part of your misery, to this compassionate Saviour. "*He can, and he will*," let this henceforth be your song, as you run your race with your eye fixed on his person.

## LECTURE XXX.

BY THE REV. A. J. CAMPBELL, MELROSE.

ACTS iii. 12-17.

THE first chapter of this book describes, among other things, Christ's ascension. The second chapter describes the descent of the Holy Ghost. This change of agency—the departure from the earth of one Divine Being, and the coming to it of another, marked the change of the dispensation. The Mosaic then passed into the Christian.

For the Mosaic economy had an almost exclusive reference to the work of Christ, and ended with it. Sacrifice virtually ceased when Christ said, "It is finished." And when he entered the holiest of all, and assumed the office of the Priesthood, all other priests were superseded. And when he sent down the Holy Spirit, the whole Jewish fabric, typical, sacrificial, and prophetic, was swept away. For what types, and sacrifices, and prophets did (they represented and foreshadowed Christ), was now to be done in a better way by the blessed Spirit, who came, according to Christ's promise, to testify of him, and to take his things and show them to the world.

The coming of the Spirit was therefore the heavenly sign of the Church's emancipation. She then rose from a state of tutelage (Gal. iv. 3), and put away childish things.

The Spirit came with power and demonstration, making his presence manifest by the miraculous gifts with which he endowed the apostles, and by the miraculous change which he wrought upon many thousand souls. For surely the latter is to be called miraculous, as truly as the former. Three thousand men, crucifiers of the Lord of glory, now turned to own him, love him, and crown him their Lord and King! Will any one deny that this was the doing of the Lord—the Spirit? It was his doing; his first most blessed effort on coming down to earth; and it shows his love to Christ, whose travailing soul he is in haste to satisfy, and his love to men, whose perishing souls he is in haste to save.

The Spirit worked through means. The chosen witnesses of Christ testified to men with their living voice. The Spirit testified to their hearts, and turned them; men believed on Christ through the word spoken by Peter, and applied by the Holy Ghost. O that his words,

which made so many sinners of Jerusalem wise unto salvation, may be profitable to us! May the Spirit carry them home to the heart of every one of you!

The two addresses of Peter,—that recorded in the second chapter and this—are very similar. This similarity is owing, not simply to the fact that the great business of the preacher of the gospel is to reiterate God's command to all men everywhere to repent, but also to the circumstance that the apostles had a specific charge to bring against the Jewish nation. As a nation, when assembled at the feast of Passover, they had crucified Christ; and now, when they are assembled again as a nation, at the feast of Pentecost, the apostles have to charge that sin upon them and to convict them of it. This was the aim of both these sermons.

But the occasions that called them forth were different. However, we must speak of the latter only.

A lame man, it appears, had been in the habit of being carried to the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, and laid there to ask alms. He had been laid there, we may gather from the language of the narrative, for a considerable time back. A circumstance which naturally leads us to ask, how came he to miss a cure from Christ, who must have often passed him in going into the temple? Was Christ unwilling to give it, or he to receive it? It is more likely that his case was purposely left over by Christ; kept in reserve to grace the mission of his apostles, or to prove that he himself was now carrying on, though absent, the same work which he carried on when present. He had healed many lame and impotent men before his death; but here was one whom he had not cured, whom the Jews perhaps insinuated that he could not cure. He is cured now; cured by the mere virtue of his name. But the name of the dead could not cure the lame. It was a proof then that Christ was risen and reigning. But probably it was more than this to those who were anxious to know whether they could now, as formerly, get their sins forgiven by Christ. "Whether is it easier to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee, or to say, Take up thy bed and walk?" Christ had found it as easy to do the one as the other when on earth. Will not his name have equal power—power to convey remission of sins to the sinner, as well as strength to the lame? The presence or absence of Christ seem to make no difference, in the one case; why should it in the other? The exalted Saviour seems to be working miracles of mercy just as he used to do; why not forgive sins as he used to do? In this way an awakened man, beholding this miracle, might have argued—and it seems to me—most warrantably.

The tidings of this miracle were quickly spread through Jerusalem, and crowds gathered to the Temple, "greatly wondering," (ver. 11.) It is not easy to account for the extreme wonder which these men

showed. Surely a miracle of healing was no new thing in Jerusalem. It shows us, however, that the priesthood had entirely succeeded in their attempt to destroy the character of Christ with the people. They had successfully opposed his cross, as an invincible stumbling-block to their faith in him. "What! will you believe him to be your Messiah, whom you crucified with the thieves? Can you believe him to be other than a deceiver now? and his miracles the work of Satan?"

The miracle of the day of Pentecost might have removed this stumbling-block in some degree, and revived the lustre of Christ's name. But it must have been explained away by the priesthood as successfully as what had gone before; and they who had called the master of the house Beelzebub, would not scruple to stigmatize his disciples as the same. He was "a gluttonous man, and a wine bibber." Are they likely to be better? "These men are full of new wine."

Supposing, then, that the Jews looked upon this miracle as truly wrought by the name of Christ, they might well wonder at it; seeing that ever since his death they had been made to believe that he was an impostor. Or supposing that they regarded it as an exercise of the apostle's power (as many seem to have done), they might equally wonder, "Is there to be no end of these mysterious exhibitions of supernatural power? And who are these men now exhibiting it? Are they new candidates for the Messiahship?"

Peter rebukes them for their stupid amazement, and contradicts this latter supposition. It was by no power nor holiness of their own they had made this man to walk (ver. 12).

Here we must admire the true humility which the gospel imparts to men. You remember how anxious both Peter and John were to be advanced in Christ's kingdom; and they had here a most favourable opportunity for glorifying themselves. The miracle is wrought, and cannot be denied. The man is healed—there he stands, in the view of the astonished populace, who will believe any account of the matter the apostles choose to give. May they not take a little credit to themselves? It will not materially damage their Master, while it may dignify them, and fix their authority as his ministers. But they had learned by this time not to seek their own things, but the things that are Jesus Christ's.

The apostle having thus frankly disclaimed the merit of this cure, proceeds to give the true account of the matter (ver. 13).

In order to feel the force of his words, and the aggravated nature of the charge he brings against his hearers, you must recollect the very peculiar position which they occupied.

You must recollect that they stood in a close covenant relationship to God, who had set them apart, and, amid many national vicissitudes, had

kept them apart, for a very special purpose, viz. that they might cherish and preserve in the world such lights and manifestations of the Messiah as God was pleased to dispense before his advent, and then, when he came, that they might be prepared to bid him welcome to the world—to erect his standard, guard his interests, and share his triumphs. Every privilege which they enjoyed was bestowed on account of this high connection, and every hope which they themselves entertained of future enlargement and prosperity, was bound up with the Messiah's coming. When that most happy event should arrive, the Jews expected to be at once secured from God's displeasure, and delivered from the Roman yoke. They anticipated it therefore with intense and eager feelings, and, under the smart of the oppressor's rod, consoled themselves with the thought, that the face of matters would be altered soon, entirely reversed, whenever their Messiah came.

He HAS COME, was Peter's startling announcement, and gone away again. He has come—your long-looked for Prince—to his covenanted people, and you have betrayed him, and denied, and killed him. Yet he is not dead, for God hath raised him up—nor is he dishonoured, for God hath glorified him, and given him a name that is above every name, by the power of which has this man been made whole, whom ye both see and know. Such was the account which Peter gave of this matter; and these were the dreadful charges which he brought against his nation. They are stated with great brevity, yet so skilfully, that the whole circumstances and succession of their crimes must have risen before the minds of his hearers.

1st, He reminds them that they, the appointed custodiers of Christ, had delivered him up to the Roman governor (ver. 13). When God sent him into the world, he sent him to you, as to his own. He laid him upon your bosom, as a child born unto you (Is. ix. 6), and he grew up among you, and spent himself in your service, refusing to go save to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, or to send any blessing across the boundary of Palestine, so entirely was he your own. And for a while you followed him, courted and caressed him—then you basely turned upon him, and gave him over to the will of a Pagan judge. It was not Judas merely who played the traitor. "Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me" (John xviii. 35). Amazing madness! You were waiting and wearying for your king; your Gentile conquerors had heard you speak of one, whose coming, near at hand, was to restore Israel, and sweep them from your land. Well, he came, and you brought him to the Roman palace in triumph, to demand the submission of your enemies? No. As a captive bound—a criminal whom you had tried and condemned, and did therefore deliver up for execution,

2*d*, He reminds them that they had denied Christ in the presence of Pilate. Pilate, better informed than yourselves, told you that this was your King; but you denied it, and affirmed that you had no king but Cæsar. Ah, fallen nation! whose life had been sustained through ages of depression and disaster by this single hope of the Messiah—whose drooping hearts had been cheered in exile, and your captive steps guided back to Canaan by the light which fell from this star of Jacob. You then renounced all your cherished prospects and foreshadowed glories, and denied Christ—content with Cæsar—so faithless were you to your trust!

But there was an aggravation of your guilt. Pilate, admonished by his wife's warning dream, and convinced of Christ's innocence, wrought with you to save his life. All in vain; you insisted that he should die. Justice said, let him go—Judas said, let him go—and Pilate "was determined to let him go;" but you said, crucify him—let his blood be upon us and our children (Matth. xxvii. 24).

3*d*, He reminds them of one circumstance which occurred at Pilate's tribunal, which, if it were possible, deepened their guilt still further. Pilate was determined to let Christ go; and, among other attempts to accomplish this, he proposed to release him according to a custom of the feast. This proposal brought out, in terrible relief, the nation's depravity. For now a choice was given them. On the one hand stood Jesus, the holy One and the just; on the other Barabbas, a thief and murderer. To whom will they grant life and freedom? Whom do they count most worthy of it—most likely, if spared, to do them good? "You desired the murderer."

4*th*, And then, finally, he reminds them how they had ended the matter, "Ye killed the Prince of Life." You quenched the light of Israel; you crowned your King with thorns, and for a throne you set him upon a cross.

Such were the acts with which Peter charged the men who were standing around him. Can you conceive circumstances more appalling than those in which they discover themselves to be placed?

There is, first, their irreparable loss. They have been anticipating bright and blessed days, and a train of heavenly mercies to come to them with their Messiah. But now they find that he has been among them, and they have missed him, and not one of their brilliant hopes has been realized!

There is next the awful truth of which they are now made aware, that in the whole of this matter they have been fighting against God. They pretended to be actuated in what they did, by jealousy for God's honour, and appealed to him as judge. And he did appear upon the stage, but not upon their side. *They* killed the Prince of Life—*God*

quicken him ; they laid him in the grave—God lifted him to the skies. The opposition in which they had placed themselves to God, and the opposite ways in which they had respectively treated Christ, must have appeared to their awakened mind very dreadful.

Then, thirdly, and worst of all, what are they to expect from this risen and exalted Saviour? They thought that they were done with his pretensions when they nailed him to the tree; and ever since, they thought that he was quietly lying in the tomb. But they find that he is risen and reigning in the sky, far beyond their reach now; and furnished with all power for the destruction of his enemies, who are likely to be his first victims!

What a mighty revulsion of feeling must have taken place in the breasts of these startled and awakened men, when they discovered their true position. It was just as if the soldier, resting from the fight, should be rudely wakened by feeling the grasp of his enemy upon his throat, whom he had left, as he thought, lifeless on the battle-field.

And, indeed, such a change of circumstances, so sudden and extreme, has never been paralleled. Had you read the thoughts of these men an hour before, you would have found them reposing tranquilly on the assurance that they were the favourites of heaven, and heirs of Messiah's kingdom. But now it seems they are God's most impious enemies. And their Messiah's advent threatens to involve them in swift destruction; their smiling paradise melts away and leaves them in the pit of despair. Nothing meets their open eye but the flaming sword of him whose blood is upon their heads—"a sword, sharpened and furbished to make a sore slaughter."

Brethren, you admit at once that the position of these Jews was a very dreadful one. Shall I say that yours is any better, if you are rejecting Christ? I say it is worse. Every one of you who hears the gospel is required to give judgment on the claims of Christ. He comes to your bar and demands a verdict from you. Is he a deceiver, or is he the true God? Have you given him up as a deceiver? No! you say. You admit his Messiahship—you acknowledge his Deity, and yet you slight him! The Jews did not do this. You believe that he has come from heaven to earth to save sinners from an endless hell, and yet you slight him! O mark what it is you profess to believe, and what it is you do. You profess to believe that the Mighty Maker of this world, the glorious Son of God, came down among fallen men, and bore the rough tempests of this world, and humbled himself to the level of the meanest worm of the dust, and died upon the cross in agony and blood. You say you believe all this, and yet you slight him, hate him, and trample him under your feet. O enemies of the cross of Christ, hear! You are worse to Jesus, and worse to your own souls—more culpable—more inexcusably and exceed-

ingly guilty, than the Jews who murdered him. And I tell you it will be more tolerable for them than for you in the day of judgment. For what you do, you do knowingly—they did it ignorantly and in unbelief.

Ver. 17, "And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers."

It may be asked upon this verse, does Peter state the ignorance of the Jews as *an excuse* for their crime, or merely as accounting for it?

Undoubtedly it does account for it. For if the princes of this world had known the mystery of God, God manifest in the flesh, they would not have slain the Lord of glory. (1 Cor. xi. 8.) It is conceivable that devils, cursed and hopeless spirits, should have assaulted the Son of God, when they found him in humiliation, forsaken of God, and apparently without defence. But it is not conceivable that mortal men, knowing the Being beside them to be God, should have done so. For whatever the effect of God's presence may be upon the lost in the other world, in this world even the worst of men are awe-struck and unnerved by any awful manifestations of God. And were one in human form to appear among us, and it were plainly seen that he was the Omnipotent Jehovah, sinners with one consent would flee away from him.

The ignorance of the Jews, then, does account for their crime, but does Peter mean to say that it excuses it? Are they guiltless, because they moved in the dark? Does their ignorance annihilate their crime? Not at all. It only alters the name of it. It shifts the burden of guilt from one part of the transaction to another, but it leaves the burden there. That they did not know the Lord of glory was their sin—a greater sin than crucifying him. He did not come from heaven without sufficient credentials, nor did he put forth his claims without giving ample proof that they were just. Four lines of evidence concentrated in him, which all concurring plainly established his Messiahship. These were—

First, *Moses and the Prophets*—witnesses beyond suspicion, held in great reverence by the Jews, and always believed, except when they testified of him.

Second, *John the Baptist*—the people counted him for a prophet. So long as he preached repentance and the reformation of manners, he was admired as a burning and a shining light; but when he turned men's faces from himself to the rising Sun of Righteousness, and pointed them to the Lamb of God, he was rejected.

Third, *His mighty works*—miracles of mercy all of them, with two exceptions—*mighty works*, yet not meant to terrify nor to destroy, but to heal, and gladden, and bless—sweet tokens of a heavenly messenger come to earth on a benign and peaceful errand.



Fourth, *His Father's testimony*, given from the excellent glory, audibly, and, we believe, intelligibly to those whose ears were not closed that they could not hear.

Thus from every quarter a decisive testimony was borne to the Messiahship of Christ, and they who resisted his claims were without excuse.

Hence we are not to regard Peter's statement as a plea in justification of *their* conduct, but as an explanation of God's. Because they had proceeded in ignorance when they crucified Christ, God was pleased to open the door of mercy to them, and gave them an opportunity of making a quick escape from hell. Thus the 17th verse is to be sustained on to the 19th verse; along with the 18th verse it forms a ground on which Peter calls them to repentance. "I wot that through ignorance ye did it"—"Repent therefore."

We learn here that ignorance does not exempt us from the punishment of sins committed through it, nor does it entitle us to pardon. At the same time it forms a ground upon which God is frequently pleased to show mercy.

Among the enemies of Christ there was one to whom Peter could not have said, "You did it ignorantly, repent therefore." There was one who would have been excepted, had he been then alive, from Christ's prayer upon the Cross. JUDAS knew what he did. He knew that it was innocent blood he was betraying, and so he seems to have been left out of Christ's previous prayer (John xvi. 12), and shut out of every place of repentance even before he found his way to "his own place," in hell.

What a solemn lesson to those who know that Jesus is the Christ, and who know too that they are resisting him! How awful, brethren, is your position! Worse surely, we repeat it, immeasurably worse, than that of the convicted murderers who stood before Peter with Christ's blood upon their hands. They did their crime in the dark, ignorant of the dignity and deity of him whom they bound, and scourged, and crucified. You crucify him afresh, but in the full day-light, conscious that he is your God, your Maker, and Judge.

Do you ever think of this? Do you ever try to estimate the guilt which attaches to those who do not lie to God upon one occasion merely, like Ananias and Sapphira, but whose whole life, like yours, is a lie—a series of reiterated hypocrisies?

Impenitent sinners!—triflers on the brink of eternity!—is it not time you should bethink yourselves? You may be very near that dreary spot—it stands on this side the grave—from which there is no path to

glory. Nothing so likely to bring you thither as this ready profession which you make of your faith in Christ, while your heart tells you that you do not know him. Professors of Christianity! is it not true of most of you that you are mere heartless pretenders in religion? But why this pretence? To keep it up is irksome to you just now, and it will do you no good at last. But you deny that it is a pretence—you solemnly declare that, if you were to die for it, you would avow your belief in Christ as God's Son and the Saviour of the world. Then mark your position and your conduct. You are standing at the foot of the cross—for faith places every believer there—and you, as a professing believer, must be held to be standing there, doing all you do in the solemn presence of the Father, and the Son, and the Spirit, who meet all penitent souls there. I say you are standing at the foot of Christ's cross, and I hear you declaring that you believe in the Divinity of him who died there; and that you believe in his death, as meant to represent God's awful displeasure against sin, and to atone for it. This is what you *say*, the creed which you cling to, and would die rather than deny. But what are you *doing*—doing at the foot of this very cross, where the odiousness and misery of sin are there set forth, painted in the agonies of the Son of God? Who will believe it? You are sinning on there—sinning more comfortably now, since Christ has died to save you from your sins. *You believe*—that pacifies your conscience, and makes sin look harmless. What though you sin a little? Faith covers a multitude of sins. Or even though you should be led on to sin a little more than you meant to do, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin—it will secure you. Do you think it will? Do you really think that this is the glorious gospel of the grace of God? What! Is the cross nothing more than a sanctuary for sin? When the wrath of God pursues it, may sin flee for shelter indifferently to the devil or to Christ? Did the Saviour spread his bleeding wing over this earth, just that it might become a safe place for sinning in? This drunkard perishes, because he does not believe; but you believe, and therefore, though you are a drunkard too, you are safe! Poor sinner! Do you, indeed, think so?

Surely the guilt of false professors in these days is very awful, and little thought of. They boast of their light, their knowledge, their services. These shall terribly condemn them—by these they are excluded from the benefit of the Saviour's prayer, "Father, forgive them!" for they know well what they are doing. Worse than the Jews, who were ignorant of the Saviour whom they crucified—worse than the devils, who had no Saviour to crucify—worse than Judas, who would have recalled his guilty deed, if he could—these false professors stand out upon

this earth as sinners without a parallel; and in the world to come they shall be set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

O professor of the blessed gospel! Beware lest ye come to the place of torment in such fearful circumstances—*you* can come to it in no other.

## LECTURE XXXI.

THE TRANSFIGURATION.

BY THE REV. J. W. TAYLOR, FLISK AND CREICH.

LUKE IX. 28-35.

FROM amid the lowliness of Christ's humble condition, the Transfiguration arises as a bright display of heavenly majesty—as a breaking forth of glory from under the cloud in which he appeared. The veil of humanity was drawn aside, and his admiring followers were admitted to behold somewhat of that glory which Jesus had with the Father before the world was.

When John saw, in prophetic vision, a door opened in heaven, “the voice as of a trumpet talked with him, and said, come up hither, and I will shew you wonderful things.” A similar voice we may now consider as proceeding forth from the Mount of Transfiguration, and calling upon us reverently to contemplate the glories of unveiled Divinity which are here displayed. Let us not be disobedient to the heavenly voice; but preparing our minds, let us ascend the mountain in company with our Saviour and his three disciples, and meditate upon the circumstances which their eyes saw, and their ears heard, and which the pen of inspiration has recorded for our instruction.

*Christ's Companions.* “He took Peter, and John, and James.” We are not informed what it was which guided Christ in the selection of these three; and conjectures are generally unsatisfactory where Scripture itself is silent. Pious ingenuity has not been wanting in the search of reasons; and this is what she has found: “Peter, because the eldest; John, because the dearest; James, because, next Peter, the zealous.” Faith, if it feels the curiosity, will remove it by resolving all into the good pleasure of Christ, and by taking his simple choice as the best of reasons—“even so, O Lord, for so it seemed good in thy sight.” Still it is remarkable that the three whom he here selects to see his glory, were those whom he afterwards chose to behold his grief. The witnesses of his majesty on Tabor, were the witnesses of his sore amazement in Gethsemane. Behold an illustration of God's ways of mercy to his Church! He makes scenes of glory preparatory to scenes of suffering—He takes his own to the “holy mount,” and makes them “eye-wit-

nesses of his majesty," before he calls them to trials for his sake. Times of revival generally precede times of trouble.

*The Place.* "And went up into a mountain." Many mountains have had a double honour bestowed upon them. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the lands they adorn, they have yet been made more eminent from being selected as the scenes of magnificent events. The sacred tops of Moriah, of Sinai, of Pisgah, of Sion, and of Calvary, will rise before the imagination; and here another mountain claims an interest second to none of them. The mountain on which Christ was transfigured is generally supposed to be Mount Tabor, in the plain of Esdraelon, about two hours distance east of Nazareth. In this land of fine views, Tabor commands one of the finest. From its top the view extends northward to the heights of Huttin, and to the steep and frowning hills of Bashan. The plain of Esdraelon spreads onward to the west, until it is shut in by the ridge of Carmel. To the south is seen the graceful range of the little Hermon, celebrated for its dews, and the Mount of Gilboa, on whose barren summits David prayed that no dew might descend. Chosen by Christ to be the scene of his glorious change, this mountain has been invested with distinguished honour. Lebanon, with its goodly cedars—Mount Olivet, the scene of Christ's frequent retirement—even Zion itself, on whose north side stands the city of the living King, is not more hallowed in the thoughts of the Christian than is the rounded top of Tabor. "Why leap ye, ye high hills, this is the hill where God desireth to dwell in?"

*The Object.* The object which Christ had in view in retiring to the solitude of this mountain is distinctly noted—"He went up to a mountain to pray." It may not be doubted but that the pure soul of Jesus would delight in the freshness and beauty of nature; and that his would be the exalted joy of connecting the beauties of nature with "the beauties of holiness." In the solitary silence of this mountain top, he would lift up his eyes to the blue heavens, and his soul to Him who sits above the heavens, and the wind which breathed around him would waft the voice of his earnest prayer. Often do we find him retiring from the crowds which followed him, to enjoy converse with his Father; and often did the shades of night close in upon him, while with strong crying and tears he made known his supplications, and was heard in that he feared. Fit pattern for us to follow! Christ never entered upon any great work without prayer. The two events in his life, in themselves the most dissimilar, are yet connected by this one point of resemblance, that it was through the gate of prayer he entered upon them both. When the deepest scene of his humiliation was to overshadow him, he went into a garden to pray; and here, when heaven's glory was about to descend upon

him, and he was about to enjoy the chief, we may say the only, outburst of personal exaltation, he gets up to this mountain top as a humble suppliant.

*The Change.* It was while engaged in this exercise, that a more glorious sight was seen than that which gladdened the pillow of Jacob at Bethel, and Tabor Mount became for a time the house of God, and the gate of heaven. And may we not take occasion from this to observe the close connection betwixt prayer and the manifestation of heavenly favours. It is out of the lowliest vales that the highest mountains often arise. It is generally after the humble exercise of sincere prayer that the heart of the believer is lifted up to its "high places;" that his face reflects the brightness of heaven, and his soul is adorned with the beauties of holiness. It was a homely illustration of this high and comforting truth, which the experience and expression of a young and anxious cottager supplied—"I never am so happy as when upon my knees." As in Christ's history, so in the experience of this poor cottager, Tabor visions succeeded to Tabor prayers.

While he was praying, a visible change spreads over the Saviour's person. The marred visage and the humble apparel of the despised Galilean, are now exchanged for a countenance of fairest beauty, and for robes of unspotted whiteness. He who, a moment before, had no form, and no comeliness, and no beauty whereby men might desire him, now appears radiant with the brightest glory. Verse 29, "As he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening."

The imagination of man may arrive at the end of created perfection, and human language may describe it, but our hearts can neither conceive nor can our lips utter the grandeur of this heavenly glory. One ray of such glory shot forth from the upper sanctuary would eclipse with its brightness the amassed heaps of earthly splendour. Any description of a scene so glorious it becomes us not to attempt. Let us rather modestly admire the dignified simplicity of sacred narration. St Matthew thus describes it—"His face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light." Never was scene more full of majesty. Never was description more full of grandeur and simplicity. His face was like THE SUN. His raiment was like THE LIGHT. Stephen's face appeared as it had been the face of an angel. Moses' face shone with an overpowering majesty, when he came down from the mount; and the children of Israel were afraid to come nigh him. But Christ's Transfiguration exceeded in glory. For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. Often did Christ, in Old Testament times, as the Angel of the Covenant, assume the human form,

as if to essay it, and to testify his readiness to assume it when the fulness of the time should come. So here we find him taking up, for a short season, even while he tabernacled in flesh, that form of glory which he will wear in heaven.

We consider Peter, John, and James, who were admitted to see Christ's glory on Tabor, as happy, but a more glorious sight still is in reserve for every one of his true disciples. Christ's prayer to his Father is, "Father, I will that where I am there they may be also;" and that prayer will, in due time, be fulfilled. On that day when the redeemed of the Lord shall return to Zion, with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads, they will be admitted to a sight of Jesus, clothed with a beauty more dazzling than what was seen on the Mount of Transfiguration. More exhilarating still! It will not be as spectators of Christ's glory merely, it will be as *sharers* of it that we will be admitted. Not as a private person has Christ risen, but as the triumphant Head of his Church; and in this character it is that he is glorified. In due time all his members will partake of his exaltation. Our bodies will also be clothed with immortal youth and beauty. This mortal shall put on immortality, and this corruptible shall be clothed with incorruption. We know that we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. With open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we shall be changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Contemplate, then, in the glories of Tabor, an earnest and an example of the believer's glorified change. But transformation precedes transfiguration. He that will be transfigured at last must be transformed now.

*Christ's Attendants.* On this interesting occasion, Christ was not alone, ver. 30. Moses and Elijah have descended from their glorified abodes to meet and to converse with the Saviour of men. Behold in this varied group, a representation of the Church in her diversified dispensations. Here, on one hand, are Moses and Elijah, the representatives of Old Testament saints—Moses, the giver of the law, Elijah, the chief of the prophets. There, on the other, are Peter, John, and James, the ministers of the New Testament. While in the midst stands Jesus, to whom the law and the prophets, and the apostles, equally bear witness, and from whom the glory of all comes. Christ is all and in all. Tabor top exhibits a precious illustration and sample of that "gathering together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth,"—which the dispensation of the Gospel hath commenced, and which the fulness of glory will consummate. Ephesians i. 10.

Replete indeed with important instruction is this reappearance of Moses and Elijah. It tells us, as Scripture generally tells us, by palpable facts, that death is not the end of being—that all the dead live before God. Nay, in this we even think we have an evidence of the resurrection of the body. For as the apostles knew that it was Moses and Elijah who conversed with them, they must have appeared in a bodily shape, so that their persons might be discovered. Elijah we know was translated, so that he did not see death. With his glorified body he might at once descend. But whence had Moses his bodily appearance? The subject has perplexed angelic intelligences. Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil, disputed about the body of Moses. Was the body of Moses, after it was forsaken by the soul “changed?” And knowing no sepulchre on earth, was it carried up to heaven, and thence sent down to wait upon Christ on Tabor? Or is this an instance of resurrection similar to that mentioned by Matthew, “Many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the grave after his resurrection, and went unto the holy city, and appeared unto many?” But this is not among the things that are revealed, and Scripture, as if seeking our profit more than the gratification of our fancy, passes by these “hidden things,” and calls our thoughts to what belongs to us and to our children.

*The subject of interview* held betwixt Christ and these glorified visitants is distinctly specified—a subject the most interesting to our fallen family—the great central doctrine of the Christian system—the decease which Christ should accomplish at Jerusalem. The Spirit of Christ which was in Moses and Elijah, did testify beforehand these sufferings of Christ, and now they seem the more desirous to look into them, inasmuch as the day of their fulfilment drew nigh.

We judge falsely if we conclude that the sorrows of Christ’s life were summed up in his active sufferings—that the agonies of Gethsemane and the pains of Calvary exhausted his griefs. These sorrows are inconceivable to us. The hour and the power of darkness then overshadowed him. But there was also a sorrow in the anticipation of them. The dark cloud cast its shadow before it, and embittered all his life. He knew from the beginning what his closing agonies would be. He knew that he had this baptism to be baptized with, and how was he straitened until it was accomplished. Even amid the glories of his Transfiguration, his heart seems occupied by this one sad thought—the decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem. Even from beneath the shining face and the glistening garments, “the Man of sorrows” is clearly seen. Unexpected conjunction! He covered the face of his glory with a cloud, at the very time that his glory shone the brightest.



He thought—he spake of his deepest humiliation, when he enjoyed his highest exaltation. He made preparation for Calvary when he was in Tabor. He, the Lord of glory, knew the times and the seasons, and by his own example he teaches us betimes to consider our latter end, to make preparation when our thoughts are the firmest, and our spirits are in their best estate, and our bodies are rejoicing in fullest health, for the evil days when flesh and heart will faint and fail, and the restless spirit will find no place for the calmness of reflection.

Probably Moses and Elijah were commissioned in the present instance to impart consolation to Christ's troubled soul in the prospect of his bloody death. And what could administer greater comfort than the sight of two heirs of bliss, who had already participated of the joys of his salvation? What could more effectually encourage him to make his soul an offering for sin, than to see of that seed who, through his merits, were made perfectly blessed in the full enjoyment of God to all eternity? Our heavenly Saviour became partaker of flesh and blood, was in all points tried as we are, and therefore his human nature, under the pressure of human woe, was refreshed with this visitation of human sympathy.

It was only of his coming death, of the decease he was about to accomplish, that Moses and Elijah could speak. In this respect the lowest place in all the plain is more elevated than the highest point of Tabor; he that is least in the kingdom of heaven now, is greater than was Moses or Elijah. For we live under a completed salvation, and can contemplate this decease as past. The sacrifice has been offered up, and is accepted; the price of man's deliverance has been paid, and is received—Christ has died, God is glorified, the law is magnified, and the curse repealed—hell is vanquished, heaven won, and man saved.

We are now brought forward to consider *the character and the conduct of the disciples*. “Peter, and they that were with him, were heavy with sleep.” Whether, my friends, is this our frailty or our fault, our misfortune or our sin? We slumber when our faculties should be absorbed in the contemplation of glory; we sleep when all our sympathies should be awakened to the fullest. Probably, in the present instance, the disciples were worn out by partaking of the hardships and wanderings of their Master. It is not wonderful then that tired nature should have sought repose in sleep. The kind apology which the compassionate Saviour pled for them on an occasion of similar infirmity, might now be equally appropriate—“the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.” Or might not the sleep which sealed the eyes of the disciples resemble the sleep which fell upon the prophets, when the visions of the Almighty were let in upon their souls—such a “deep sleep” as Daniel had when,

by the banks of Ulai, he heard the voice of Gabriel, or when he saw the great vision by the side of the great river Hiddekel. Our bodily eyes cannot behold, without being dazzled, the brightness of the sun shining in his strength, so neither could these disciples have beheld throughout the sight of glory which Tabor presented. Our natural bodies befit not heavenly sights.

It would appear from the narration that the disciples saw only the concluding part of this scene of glory. It was with them as with Moses in the cleft of the rock, God passed by in the brightness of glory and covered Moses with his hand. But the covering hand was withdrawn, and the last shades of the retiring glory Moses saw. The diversified character of the disciples is well marked by what happened upon their awakening and seeing the conclusion of the Transfiguration. While John and James were lost in wonder, and probably asked themselves what meaneth this great sight, Peter manifests his promptness, his forwardness of spirit, by breaking the silence with "Master, it is good for us to be here," &c. &c. Out of the mouth of babes and of sucklings God has often ordained praise to himself. Out of the mouth of the unbeliever He often draws forth testimonies to the truth—so here he makes the lips of righteous Peter unwittingly to utter a sentiment full of truth and of propriety. Truly it is a good thing ever to be found in company with the Saviour. Better to fast with Christ than to feast with the world. Better a prison with Christ than a palace without him. Better the reproach of Christ than Egypt's greatest honours. But if it is thus good to be with Christ even in his low estate, to descend with him into the valley of humiliation, what will it be to be taken into the Mount with him, to behold his glory, and "to sit down with Him on his throne, even as he overcame and sat down with his Father on his throne?"

It is good, my Christian friends, for us to be here. This is the place where prayer is wont to be made. This is the house of God. God has promised to make this place a blessing, and to meet with us here, Matt. xviii. 20. Let us therefore look up in earnest prayer to God at this time, that we may experience the fulfilment of that promise. Let us now think of the loving kindness of God in the midst of his temple.

There was propriety in the first part of Peter's saying, there is wandering and incoherence in the second, "let us make three tabernacles," &c. He speaks of heavenly spirits dwelling in clay tabernacles. He dreams of stability in the midst of change. He thinks of the triumph without the struggle—of remaining in the Mount amid its peace, its seclusion, and glory, while there was duty below. He was saying to

himself, "This is my rest, here will I stay, for I do like it;" while Christ was saying to him, "Go down, Peter, and preach my gospel, and maintain my cause, notwithstanding of whatever trouble or persecution may arise." Peter's words indicate what Scripture tells us, "he knew not what he said."

*The conclusion.* The brightest scenes on earth are only transitory. The cloud of glory is often succeeded by the cloud of gloom. While Peter was speaking a cloud descends, and receiving Moses and Elijah under its overshadowing vail, hides them from the disciples' view. Doubtless upon this cloud there would be inscribed the character of the Divine majesty. It was the hiding of his power, the pavilion around him. The disciples acknowledge with a reverential fear the presence of that God whose dwelling is sometimes the thick darkness, and sometimes the brightness of light. They saw no similitude, but out of the cloud a voice proceeds, and conveys to them instruction worthy of all this august preparation, "This is my beloved Son, hear him."

Here is the end of Tabor manifestation. Here is the end of all Scripture revelation, to testify of Jesus, and to obtain from man a believing submission to Him. Twice have the heavens opened, and twice has a voice from the most excellent glory proclaimed that the love of God dwells in Jesus. No other manifestation of God to poor sinners, but only in the face of Jesus Christ. No other ray of Divine mercy to the weary and heavy-laden, but only through this Sun of Righteousness. God's one word throughout the Gospel to fallen man is, "this is my beloved Son." From the great cloud of heavenly witnesses—patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and believers in every age, it is still the same voice—Christ, God's beloved, and you, O sinner, beloved for Christ's sake, accepted in the beloved, justified, sanctified, preserved, glorified through Him. The only way in which God the Father deals with sinful man is by pointing them to his Son.

That which is Evangelical is also practical. Gospel duty is never separated from Gospel doctrine. Religion which terminates not in action is delusion. In this heavenly exhibition of Divine truths, doctrine precedes, duty follows. "This is my beloved son," is the Divine revelation. "Hear ye him," is the Divine command. God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spoke in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, is in these last days speaking unto us by his Son. Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we hear, for if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord? If we are Zion's children, and have been taught of the Lord, we will hear Him. His voice will be a sweet voice to us, for it will be

“the voice of our beloved.” Every note of that voice will be sweet to us, and will find a responsive echo in each of our hearts. “Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth,” will be our soul’s ready language. When thou speakest in mercy, I will hear with gladness. When thou speakest with authority, let me hear with submission. When thou speakest with reproof, let me hear with contrition. When thou speakest in wrath, I will hear with fear. I will kiss the Son, lest he be angry with me, and I perish from the way when his wrath is kindled but a little. This is one of Christ’s marks of his own—one of the simplest and one of the surest of all marks. “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.”

The memory of departed pleasures is sweet. The mind delights to dwell on the joys of the years that are gone. Thus it was with Peter. Thirty years after this, when he was an old man, and when he was about “to put off his tabernacle,” and to bid farewell to all earthly things, the mind of Peter goes back to the glories of Tabor. It was one of the most cherished of his remembrances, and therefore an uppermost one among his latest thoughts. “We have not followed cunningly devised fables,” are his words after he had felt the burden of threescore and ten years, “when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty; *for he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.* And this voice which came from heaven we heard, *when we were with him in the Holy Mount,*” 2 Peter i. 16-18.

In the same spirit with Peter’s hallowed recollections, are those of David, when he said, “I will remember thee from the land of Jordan, from the Hermonites, and from the Hill Mizar,” places where God had met with David and comforted him. Brethren, has our religion its pleasant recollections? Have we any places consecrated in our memories, as places where we have had fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ? Amid Zion’s many sanctuaries, can we point to any one and say, it was in that church that the Word came with living power to me, discerning the very thoughts and intents of my heart? Is there any secret place of which, so oft as we are reminded of it, we think as of a chamber of vision? Or can we in moments of solemn musing, recall communion seasons, when refreshing was sent to us from the presence of the Lord? These are Tabor recollections—times when we were with Him in the Holy Mount.

## LECTURE XXXII.

DANIEL'S PROPHECY OF THE SEVENTY WEEKS.

BY THE REV. SELBY ORD DODS, MAYBOLE.

“ Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people, and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy. Know therefore and understand, *that* from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince *shall* be seven weeks and threescore and two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself; and the people of the prince that shall come, shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof *shall* be with a flood; and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week; and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make *it* desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined, shall be poured upon the desolate.”—DANIEL IX. 24-27.

THIS vision was made known to Daniel in answer to prayer. Contrary to the ordinary course of the Divine procedure, the answer was returned before the prophet rose from his knees. Let no one suppose that the manifestation of this vision was not, strictly speaking, an answer to Daniel's prayer; because he did not pray merely for the restoration of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity and the rebuilding of the literal city Jerusalem and its temple, but for the restoration of the whole civil and ecclesiastical polity of that rebellious people. This is evident even from the words of the prayer. “O Lord,” says he at the 16th verse of this chapter, “according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain.” Then, at the 17th verse, he says, “Cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate.” Although the mind of the prophet had contemplated nothing more than the literal rebuilding of the city and temple, it was surely an answer to his prayer when God made known to him the precise period of Messiah's coming, which had been so long foretold and anxiously looked for; and of which all the Jewish rites and ceremonies were no more than types and shadows. Not only so, but this vision stretches forward to a period when the dispersion and persecutions of the Jews shall be no more—when they shall be restored to their own land, and their condition rival, if not exceed, their ancient glory. Thus, when we pray for temporal blessings, God often sends spiritual blessings, and even exceeds our requests.

Why, it may very naturally be asked, was the advent of Christ so long delayed? We dare not presume to speak confidently on this subject, because it belongs to "the deep things of God." Nevertheless we can discover some very important ends that were served by the delay. The inborn depravity of the human heart, and the darkness which naturally envelops the human mind, had sufficient time to manifest themselves. The depth and virulence of sin's disease were fully brought to light, in order that the necessity and importance of the Saviour's remedy might be more clearly perceived and appreciated. The length of the delay afforded a more convincing testimony to the faithfulness and kindness of God when the Messiah actually appeared. Besides, the state of the world at the time was in many respects suited to His advent. Not to speak of the general expectation of His coming which prevailed in the east, by the advancement of civilization, the extension of national intercourse, and the commanding influence of the Roman empire, many facilities were opened up for the spread of the Saviour's cause.

That this prophecy refers to the advent of Christ is so obvious to the most superficial reader, that it has never been denied. That it could not relate to any matters in the history of the past is evident, not merely from the language of the prophecy itself, but also from the fact, that previous to that time there were no events or circumstances corresponding with those here mentioned. And that this prophecy could not have been written after the events referred to occurred, is obvious to demonstration, from the fact, that it was in the possession of the Jews, and formed part of the sacred canon, several centuries before these events took place.

This prophecy is one of the most interesting and important which the Bible contains in reference to the Messiah. Its interest and importance are greatly enhanced by the present ominous state of the Jews. It is, at the same time, one of the most difficult passages of the Word of God. I know no passage on the consideration of which so great an amount of learning has been expended, and in regard to which so great a variety of opinions have been entertained. It is of importance, however, to observe, that whatever view we may adopt, it is not essential to salvation.

In the observations which I shall lay before you, I shall not perplex your minds or fatigue your attention with much critical investigation, which is more suited to a theological class-room or a work from the press. I shall interfere as little as possible with the common translation, cherishing, as I do, the strongest antipathy to the unwarranted freedom which many Biblical critics use with the Word of God; and shall confine myself as much as possible to a literal interpretation, believing,

as I do, that we ought never to interpret a passage figuratively unless a literal interpretation involves something absurd, inconsistent with the preceding and subsequent context, or the general tenor of God's word.

This prophecy is divided into two grand periods, one of which is obviously a subdivision of the other, because the events foretold are the same in both, and the several numerical parts of the one exactly correspond with or are equal to the sum of the other. In other words, we have the period of seventy weeks, spoken of at the 24th verse, during and at the end of which certain events therein specified are to take place; then in the subsequent verses, we have seven weeks, three score and two weeks, and one week, during which the several events briefly enumerated in the 24th verse are to be fulfilled. Thus the 24th verse forms a kind of preface or introduction to the subsequent verses.

The first question, then, which suggests itself is when did these seventy weeks commence? It is said, at the 25th verse, "from the going forth of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince, shall be seven weeks, and three score and two weeks." But what commandment is here referred to? because we find three commandments or decrees issued by the kings of Persia for the rebuilding of the temple and city of Jerusalem, and for the restoration of the civil and ecclesiastical polity of Judah—one by Cyrus, in the first year of his reign, contained in the Book of Ezra i. 1-4; another by Darius, about the third or fourth year of his reign, contained in Ezra vi. 1-12; and a third by Artaxerxes, in the seventh year of his reign, contained in Ezra vii. 11-26. To these some commentators have added a fourth by the same Artaxerxes, in the twentieth year of his reign. But if you examine, at your leisure, Nehemiah ii. 1-9, you will find that which has been regarded as a fourth decree was simply a permission granted to Nehemiah to superintend and expedite the work.

It being impossible, therefore, to ascertain *a priori* which of these decrees is here referred to, we must return to the 24th verse, in order to ascertain the termination of the seventy weeks; and having ascertained their termination, we shall soon ascertain their commencement. In the 24th verse, we have six distinct circumstances or events specified, which must take place either during the currency or immediately at the close of the seventy weeks—the *finishing of transgression*, *i. e.* Christ's making an end of sin by taking upon himself its penalty, and pledging himself to destroy its power; *the making an end of sin*, or the sin-offerings, *i. e.* Christ's offering himself upon the Cross once for all, as the great sacrifice for sin, and the antitype of all the Jewish sacrifices; *the making of reconciliation for iniquity*, *i. e.* Christ's removal of the middle wall of partition betwixt the sinner and his God—slaying the enmity

of the human heart, and rendering it possible for God to be at peace with us through His grand mediatorial work; *the bringing in of everlasting righteousness, i. e.* Christ's righteousness, on which the redeemed build all their hopes, and which shall endure for ever; *the sealing up of the vision and the prophecy, i. e.* the completion or fulfilment of all those visions and prophecies in reference to Messiah, the promised deliverer, which God had given to His Church and people; *the anointing of the Most Holy, i. e.* the consecrating or setting apart of Christ to the mediatorial work, especially by the descent of the Holy Ghost and the expressed approbation of His Father at His baptism by His fore-runner John the Baptist.

Now, from one of these six events we must date the termination of the seventy weeks. Had any other great events been included, they would unquestionably have been mentioned. We must date from the one which was last fulfilled. The last of these events, then, is the crucifixion; therefore, from that event we must date the termination of the seventy weeks. You are aware, I doubt not, that in this and other portions of prophetic Scripture, a week represents a period of seven years, a day for a year being a common method of computation among the Jews; consequently, seventy weeks are synonymous with or equal to 490 years. In order, then, to ascertain the commencement of the seventy weeks, we have only to calculate backwards 490 years from the crucifixion.

But chronologists are not agreed as to the point whether we must calculate by lunar or solar years. This matter we conceive may be easily settled by a simple experiment. If we go backwards from the crucifixion 490 lunar years, each consisting of 354 days, according to the true astronomical computation, or of 360 days according to the false computation, we do not arrive at any of the periods at which either of the three several decrees were issued, or any era which can be considered as the date of the commencement of the seventy weeks; because they commenced at the specified date of an edict to rebuild Jerusalem, and no such edict was issued at either of the periods to which we are brought by these two modes of computation. But if we go backwards 490 solar years, each consisting of 365 days, we are brought, even with the exactness of a month, to the issuing of the edict in the seventh year of the reign of Artaxerxes Longimanus; for the crucifixion took place in the year 33 of the Christian era, or the year 4746 of the Julian period, and at the time of the Passover, which was always celebrated in the middle of the month *Nisan, i. e.* the Jewish month answering to our March. And going backwards from this period 490 years, we are brought to the corresponding *Nisan* in the year 458 before the Christian era, or the



year 4256 of the Julian period, in the *Nisan* of which year Ezra received his commission to carry into effect the decree enacted by Artaxerxes Longimanus, in the seventh year of his reign. This simple experiment proves two things—1. That our computation must be by solar and not by lunar years; 2. That the date of the foresaid decree of Artaxerxes must be the commencement of the seventy weeks.

How, it may be asked, does this interpretation quadrate with the first clause of the 24th verse—"Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people, and upon thy holy city;" which seems to imply that the rebuilding of the city and temple of Jerusalem was to commence at the beginning, and their overthrow was to take place at the termination of the seventy weeks? Now, were we to understand the rebuilding to be of a literal description, there would be an insuperable difficulty to the above interpretation. But that a literal rebuilding cannot be meant is evident from the simple fact, that the literal rebuilding commenced in pursuance of the edict of Cyrus, in the year *A. C.* 536, and was again demolished by the Romans in the year 70 of the Christian era, which period comprehends not 490 but 605 years. And that a figurative rebuilding, in other words, that the restoration of the civil and ecclesiastical polity of the Jews, and not the literal rebuilding of the city and temple of Jerusalem is meant, is obvious from the most superficial view of the decree of Artaxerxes. You will find it recorded in the Book of Ezra, ch. vii. 12-26. And that we are using no unwarranted freedom with the language of Scripture is evident from the fact, that the other prophets employ terms similar to those used in this prophecy when speaking of the re-establishment of Judah in the latter times. See Jeremiah xxxi. 4; xxxiii. 7, 8; Amos ix. 11; Isaiah lx. 10-18; liv. 11, 12. The same figurative style pervades many portions of the New Testament. See 1 Corinth. iii. 10, 11; Ephesians ii. 19-22; Jude xx.; Hebrews ix. 11, 12; xi. 10; Rev. xxi. 1, to end.

Now the time or continuance of the holy figurative city, in other words the civil and ecclesiastical polity of the Jews after its restoration, was exactly 490 years, that being the period which elapsed from its restoration by Ezra to the crucifixion of Christ.

Verse 25, "Know therefore and understand," &c. How are we to dispose of the two periods here spoken of? The seven weeks or forty-nine years, we refer to the period which elapsed during the restoring of Judah's polity, the last act of reformation under the administration of Nehemiah the successor of Ezra, which was the final removal of unlawful marriages among the people recorded in Nehemiah xiii. 23-31, having taken place about the close of that period. Then, from that time "unto the Messiah the Prince," there is a term of threescore and

two weeks. Now this phrase "unto the Messiah the Prince," cannot mean unto the natural birth or unto the death of the Messiah, because such an interpolation is altogether unwarranted by the language itself; it would allow no time for Christ's public ministry, and is inconsistent with fact, because his birth did not take place at the end of the sixty-nine weeks; neither did his crucifixion take place at the end of the sixty-nine but of the seventy weeks. The phrase therefore must mean unto the official coming of Christ at the commencement of the ministry of His forerunner John the Baptist, which exactly synchronises with the termination of the sixty-nine weeks, for the Baptist's ministry commenced seven years before the crucifixion, or in the year 4739 of the Julian period. Now Christ himself declares that the ministry of the Gospel did not commence with His own personal preaching, but with the previous preaching of His forerunner John the Baptist. "The law and the prophets," says he, "were until John; since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it," Luke xvi. 16.

In the last clause of the 25th verse there is no difficulty. It obviously refers to the obstacles thrown in the way of Ezra and Nehemiah, while carrying on their work of reformation—obstacles familiar to the minds of those who are conversant with Old Testament history.

Verse 26, "And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah," &c. If the translation is allowed to remain as it stands, the first difficulty that presents itself is the reconciling of the clause, "after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah," &c., with our interpretation of the preceding verses, and the fact that Messiah was not cut off at the end of the threescore and two weeks added to the seven weeks during which the restoration was accomplished; in other words, at the end of the sixty-nine but of the seventy weeks. Dr Predeaux has suggested that the word *after* must be understood in what he calls a large sense, meaning not immediately at the close of the sixty-nine weeks, but at some subsequent period not far distant. We fear, however, that such a liberty as this would destroy all precision of language. Besides, it could as easily have been said after threescore and three weeks, which corresponds with the fact. It has therefore been suggested by the learned Faber that the word here rendered "shall be cut off," should be rendered actively "shall cut off," referring not to the crucifixion, but to the city and the sanctuary being cut off, not by excision, which did not take place until their final destruction by the Romans under Titus, in the year seventy of the Christian era, but to their being cut off by divorce, which did take place at the end of the sixty-nine weeks, when the establishment of the Gospel dispensation was commenced by the preaching of John the Baptist. See Isaiah i. 1-7. The proposed translation of

Faber runs thus—"After the weeks seven and the weeks sixty and two, the Anointed One shall cut off by divorce, so that they shall be no more his, both the city and the sanctuary. For the people of the prince that shall come shall act corruptly, but the end thereof *shall be* with a flood; and unto the end of a war firmly decided upon *shall be* desolations."—Faber, p. 229.

Let no one be alarmed at giving up the passing testimony here afforded to the reality of the atonement, "shall Messiah," &c. because that blessed doctrine is not based on mere incidental expressions, but on broad, explicit, oft-repeated, and incontrovertible statements of God's word.

What are we to understand by "the people of the prince that shall come?" Not the Romans under Titus, as some have supposed, because this destroys the unity of the prophecy; for we think the same individual is referred to from the 24th verse to the end of the chapter. We are to understand by the Prince and his people Christ himself and the Jews. It is not necessary to prove to you that Christ is often spoken of in Scripture as "He that should come," (Genesis xlix. 10; Isaiah lix. 20; Micah v. 2), and the Jews as His own people; and every one acquainted with the life and discourses of Christ (Matt. xv. 3-6; Matt. xv. 7-9; Matt. iii. 7-12; John i. 2), must know something of the fearful wretchedness and unbelief of the Jews, and their conduct towards Messiah. They may well be said to have "acted corruptly." "He came unto his own," says the Evangelist John, "and his own received him not;" and this rejection, in connection with their general depravity, is assigned in this prophecy as the cause of their being cut off or divorced. The war here spoken of must necessarily refer to the war waged against the Jews by the Roman army under Titus—a war which was expressly foretold not only by Old Testament prophets, but by Christ himself, (see Matt. xxiii. 27-39; also Luke xxi. 20, &c.) This war might well be styled a flood, a prophetic name for a hostile invasion, because, like a mighty torrent, it rolled down every thing before it. It might well be said there should be "desolations."\* Neither were the predicted desolations confined to Jerusalem, but extended throughout all Judea. (See Bp. Newton's Dissertations, xix.)

Verse 27, "And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week," &c. The vision having referred to the dreadful punishment of the Jews for their rejection of the Messiah in the literal destruction of

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\* See Faber's remarks on the Siege of Jerusalem in his work on the prophecy under consideration, p. 353-4. Also the account of the destruction of the temple given by Josephus, B. 6, c. 5, &c.

their city and temple by the Romans, returns to the end of the sixty-nine weeks, and gives us an account of the business of the last or seventieth week, *i. e.*, seven years. By the confirming of the covenant during these seven years we are obviously to understand the establishment of the Gospel dispensation, which Paul styles "a better covenant," (Heb. viii. 6), by the ministry of John the Baptist, which lasted three years and a half, and the ministry of Christ, which lasted other three years and a half, and especially by His death, which took place at their close.

The clause "in the midst of the week," Sir Isaac Newton, Faber, and others translate "in half a week," and refer it not to the last week of the seventy, but to a period subsequent to the crucifixion—to the three years and a half during which the Jewish war continued and ended with the final destruction of the city and temple, in the year seventy of the Christian era. By such an interpretation many difficulties are obviated, but there is this insurmountable objection to it, it breaks the continuity of the prophecy. We shall therefore attempt an explanation of the passage as it is rendered in our common version, only rendering the last word "desolater" instead of "desolate," and referring it to the Romans instead of the Jews. The phrase "in the midst of the week," we refer to the commencement of Christ's public ministry. The phrase "he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease," we refer to Christ's proclaiming the overthrow of the Levitical economy. Then the vision stretches beyond the mere disannulling of that economy, to the literal destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem, and the consequent miseries which befel the Jews—"for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate," we have the authority of Christ himself for referring these words to the literal destruction of the city and temple by the Romans. "When ye therefore," says Christ, "shall see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, then let them which be in Judea flee unto the mountains," &c., Matt. xxiv. 15, 16—"Even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolater," *i. e.*, the dispersed and miserable state of the Jews shall continue until the purposes of God in reference to them have been accomplished, and the time for the final destruction of the Roman empire has arrived, then that empire shall be swept away, and the Jews, the long-despised, captive Jews, shall return and possess in peace and in triumph the Holy Land. Long have they hung their harps upon the willows as they sat and wept by the rivers of Babylon, while they thought of the holy city in which their fathers dwelt, and the temple in which their fathers worshipped deserted and laid in ruins, while the nations among whom they have been dispersed have in cruelest mockery required of them mirth, saying, "Sing us one

of the songs of Zion," and have only received the touching reply, "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" But, O daughter of Babylon, who hast long sat in scarlet, fancying thyself a queen who should see no sorrow, thy hands are red with the blood of murdered saints, thy days are numbered, the cup of thine iniquity will soon be full, and thou must drink it to the very dregs. Destruction is thy portion, but the "ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away," (Isaiah xxxv. 10). When the Roman empire has served the purpose of a rod to chasten God's people, it shall be broken in pieces and cast into the fire. Then shall this magnificent vision receive its full and final accomplishment. Thus even amid the awful gloom which hung over his country, and the tremendous desolations which he beheld in vision coming upon his countrymen, light broke in upon Daniel's mind, and hope cheered his well-nigh desponding heart.

I have thus given you a very brief interpretation of this interesting and important prophecy. The views I have given I now commend to your attentive and prayerful consideration. Should any of you wish to prosecute the subject further, I would take the liberty of referring you to the following works, among others that might be mentioned, as being well worthy of your perusal—Sir Isaac Newton's "Observations on Daniel;" Prideaux's "Connection of the Old and New Testament History;" Faber's "Dissertation on the Prophecy of Daniel's Seventy Weeks."

I shall now conclude with a few practical remarks, suggested by our examination of this passage of Scripture—1. The greatest caution is requisite in interpreting prophecy. By giving loose reins to an exuberant fancy, many have been led into grievous errors. We should never attempt a figurative, if the passage can consistently bear a literal interpretation. We should beware of twisting a passage in order to make it harmonise with some preconceived notion. We should sit down to the study of the Bible with all the humility and docility of little children, bent on the acquisition of truth, and resolved to follow the truth whithersoever it may lead us, though it should demolish any favourite theory of our own. We should beware of using any unwarrantable liberty with the common translation of the Bible. I confess I have been shocked with the freedom of translating which several writers have taken with this passage, in order to make it chime in with their favourite notions. Some slight emendations, we admit, may occasionally be made on the common version of the Bible; but these affect no important doctrine. It is, on the whole, a most faithful and valuable

translation. Let no unlettered person imagine that the learned have an undue advantage over him in the interpretation of the Bible. Learning is useful rather as a weapon of defence than an instrument of interpretation. The Bible is our best interpreter. Commentaries are valuable in their own place; but the most effectual way by which to ascertain the mind of God, as revealed in His word, is to compare one portion with another, and seek by prayer the enlightening influences of the Spirit—a privilege from which even the humblest and most illiterate individual is not excluded. The interpretation of the humble cottage patriarch, who knows his Bible well, and on his bended knees maintains a daily intercourse with heaven, is generally more to be confided in than that of the mere learned speculator. Hence it is that we prefer the simple expositions of such men as the good old Mathew Henry to many of the ablest biblical critics of Germany.

2. Whatever difficulties may hang over this and other passages of the Bible, and however much learned men may differ in regard to them, all those passages which unfold the fundamental articles of Christianity, such as the doctrine of the Trinity, the fall, original sin, the atonement, justification by faith, the sanctification of the spirit, and a state of future rewards and punishments, are so plain that a child can read and understand them, and they are oft repeated. These glorious doctrines rest not on one isolated verse, paragraph, or chapter. In support of each a multitude of incontrovertible texts can be produced. In fact, they pervade the whole of this blessed book. If you were assured that, buried amid a heap of sand, there lay a number of particles of gold, you would eagerly search for them, and reckon your time and labour well spent if you found them. If you were assured, that in a certain large field there lay concealed a most valuable treasure, you would proceed to dig it all over until you found it, and you would consider you had done well when success crowned your exertions. And shall we grudge any exertions, any sacrifices for the sake of gold that never grows dim—for the sake of a treasure that shall never decay, and shall never be taken from us? If the truths essential to salvation lay buried in the most ambiguous and difficult phrases or passages, which it required the most learned and elaborate criticism to unfold, most cheerfully should we grapple with the task, when the salvation of the soul depended on it. How gladly then should we hail the fact that the truths essential to salvation lie on the very surface—are to be found in every page of that blessed book, expressed in the simplest and most expressive terms? How highly should we prize and how carefully should we study our Bibles?

3. This prophecy, like the other prophetic portions of Scripture, furnishes a powerful, an irresistible argument in favour of the Divine origin of Christianity. A person without the gift of prophecy may foretell an event in the natural, but not in the moral world. The skilful astronomer, simply by a knowledge of those laws which regulate the planetary system, can foretell, with the utmost exactness, the appearance of a comet, an eclipse of the sun or moon, many years before the event takes place; but no one, unless moved by the Holy Ghost, can foretell, several hundred years before, some grand revolution of providence. No one but an inspired prophet could tell with such precision the time of Messiah's appearance. This passage proves, as by a simple process in arithmetic, or a mathematical demonstration, the Divine inspiration of the Bible. And, be it observed, the evidence of prophecy is of an accumulative description. Stretching forward, as it does, to the end of time, it is ever gathering strength as the events foretold successively come to pass. It is like the stream, which perhaps neither broad nor deep as it flows down the mountain side, widens and deepens, gathering strength from a thousand tributaries, until it rolls down a resistless torrent into the ocean!

4. This prophecy furnishes us with a powerful argument for the conviction of the infidel Jews. In arguing with them we must draw our arguments from the Old Testament Scriptures, whose inspiration all of them admit, while all of them reject, and many of them never heard of the New Testament. We must therefore draw our arrows from the Old Testament quiver, if we wish them to enter the heart of a Jew. And there is no passage in the Old Testament more fitted to overturn the prejudices than the one we have been considering; because, calculate the seventy weeks as you please—compute either by lunar or solar years, divide and sub-divide, according to any of the theories that have been propounded—these weeks have long since expired, and the Messiah, whose coming was announced in this prophecy with arithmetical exactness, has long since appeared, “to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself,” (Heb. ix. 26; Luke ii. 8, &c.) It is now 1846 years since the glory of the Lord shone round about the humble shepherds of Bethlehem, as they watched over their flock by night, and a celestial sound greeted their ears with the royal proclamation, “Unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour who is Christ the Lord,” while a multitude of the heavenly host sung in sweetest melody, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men.” And history, incontrovertible history, tells us that this same Jesus, a few years afterwards, was crucified on the Hill of Calvary, as the long-foretold and anxiously expected Saviour of the world.

Ah, ye unbelieving, infatuated Jews, why do ye reject the Son of God, the only Redeemer of mankind? You may look for another Messiah, but ye shall look in vain. Never shall such another light be seen, nor such a song be sung on the plains of Judah—never shall another infant Jesus be cradled in Bethlehem's manger—never shall another Saviour die on Calvary's Hill. *As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so has the Son of Man been already lifted up.* (John iii. 14). Ye are therefore inexcusable if ye persist in your impenitence and unbelief.

But what concerns the Jews, concerns sinners of every age and clime. Ah! it is a delightful task to herald the tidings of a full and free salvation to a guilty world. Yes, Oh! sinner, whosoever thou art, and whatever may have been thy former, and whatever may be thy present character, this prophecy brings glad tidings to you. It tells you of a fountain in which you may be cleansed from the pollutions of sin—of a physician who can cure all the diseases of your soul—of the balm that can solace your agonized heart—in other words, this prophecy tells you—even you, where and how you may find pardon, peace, sanctification, and eternal life, by believing on the same Jesus who died upon the cross when the seventy weeks were ended.

And oh! dear brethren, let all of us remember that the subject on which we have been meditating, comes home to the business and the bosoms of us all. The truths of this blessed book, and especially such passages as that which we have been considering, are not designed merely to form the subjects of speculative enquiry. On them depend the salvation of the soul—by them the decisions of the judgment-day are to be regulated. And let you and me remember that mere knowledge either of literature, philosophy, or the Bible—mere orthodoxy of creed or skilful argumentation, will be of no avail at the grand assizes of assembled worlds, which will as certainly approach as the end of the seventy weeks. If we have been the means of convincing and impressing others, the severer will be our doom if we have neither been convinced nor impressed ourselves. Let no one deceive himself; for those only will be found on the right-hand side of the Judge, whose names are enrolled in the Lamb's Book of Life!

May God bless these truths for the mutual edification of us all through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.



## SERMON CXIX.

PRECEPT, PROMISE, AND PRAYER; AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE HARMONY  
BETWEEN DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY AND HUMAN AGENCY.

BY THE REV. HUGH MARTIN, PANBRIDE.

“ Make you a new heart and a new spirit.”—Ez. xviii. 31.

“ A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you.”—Ez. xxxvi. 26.

“ Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.”—Ps. li. 10

It is proposed in the following discourse to enquire into the relations which subsist among these three verses, with the view of exhibiting the helplessness and responsibility of man in connexion with the sovereignty and grace of God in the matter of the new heart, (and indeed in salvation generally); if by the blessing of the Divine Spirit, we may lead you to despair of “ man, with whom this is impossible,” and with mingled anxiety and hopefulness to have recourse to “ Him with whom all things are possible,” (Matt. xix. 26)—“ even God, who quickeneth the dead, and who calleth the things that are not as though they were,” (Rom. iv. 17.)

That these texts are closely related to each other must be obvious even on the most cursory examination. The same expressions occur in each of them, and they all clearly point to one and the same subject of momentous interest. A farther attention, however, will show, that while the subject is the same in *all*, it is presented in a different light in *each*. In all, the one unvaried topic of regeneration is placed before us; but in passing from one to another, the point of view from which we look upon it is changed. In the first, it is presented to us embodied in a command, “ Make you a new heart and a new spirit.” In the second, it is embodied in an offer, “ A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you.” In the third, it is embodied in a supplication, “ Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.” The first comes from God the Lawgiver; the second comes from God the Redeemer; the third comes from man the suppliant. The first is the loud and authoritative voice of Majesty; the second is the still small voice of Mercy; the third is the humble, earnest voice of Entreaty. In the first, God presents his authority and demands his right; in the second, God presents his mercy, and makes offer of his gift; in the third, man presents to God his own offer again, and pleads for its fulfilment. The first is an utterance from the throne of justice;

the second is an utterance from the throne of grace ; the third is an utterance from its footstool. The first is a Precept ; the second is a Promise ; the third is a Prayer.

A true veneration for the word of the living God, will at once deliver us from the sin and folly of looking on this as a random combination, the product of mere chance, and will dispose us to behold in it an exhibition of Divine wisdom, and the result of a Divine arrangement, fraught, we may well believe, with much practical instruction, and calculated to give comprehensive and satisfactory views of certain vital "truths once delivered to the saints." It is not with the materials of a curious speculation, savouring more of ingenuity than utility, that we are furnished in these verses, and in the threefold light which they cast upon the self-same subject. On the contrary, they are replete with principles which pervade the Word of God, and the life of God in the soul,—principles which are the only real key to the harmony of Divine truth, written both in Scripture "and on the fleshly tablets of the heart." And it may deepen this impression on our minds, if we consider that the three verses chosen as the subject of illustration are not the only three in Holy Scripture so related to each other, but an instance only of a general rule—a specimen merely of a very frequent arrangement. It might be shown by a large enumeration of cases, that every duty incumbent upon us, as the sinful creatures of the Most High, may be regarded in the same threefold aspect ; *first*, as enjoined in a command to performance ; *secondly*, as involved in a proffer of help ; and *thirdly*, as acknowledged in a supplication for help. Let the following suffice.

Is it our duty to seek a knowledge of God—an acquaintance with his name, his character, his nature ? assuredly, for "this is life eternal," (John xvii. 3), and thus only shall we "be at peace." Then the command is, "Acquaint thyself with God," (Job xxii. 21) ; the promise is "I will give them a heart to know me," (Jer. xxiv. 7) ; and the appropriate prayer is that of the Psalmist, "Give me understanding according to thy word," (Ps. cxix. 169). If following his example, "thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding, then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God." (Prov. ii. 3 and 5). Again, the duty of saving faith, so often neglected *in the character of a duty*, is presented to us in Scripture, under the same threefold aspect. It is matter of precept, "This is his commandment, that we should believe upon the name of his Son Jesus Christ," (1 John iii. 23) ; it is matter of promise also, "By grace are ye saved through faith ; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God," (Eph. ii. 8) ; the gift of God, promised "on the behalf of Christ," and

bestowed in answer to the intercession of the "priest," now "upon his throne"—"I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not," (Phil. i. 29, and Luke xxii. 32); and it is matter of daily supplication with all saints, "Lord, I believe, help mine unbelief," (Mark ix. 24). Another very interesting illustration of this principle, and one in which we do not need to bring the texts from different portions of the Word, is found in the sixth chapter of the Gospel of John, where Jesus is speaking of himself as the true manna, the bread of life which cometh down from heaven. In the midst of this discourse, he lays the following injunction on his disciples, "Labour for the meat which endureth to everlasting life" (ver. 27)—an injunction which he immediately follows up with the precious corresponding promise—"which the son of man shall give unto you;" and, rightly exercised under the teaching of their Lord, the apostles hasten to offer up to him the appropriate prayer, "Lord evermore give us this bread," (ver. 34). And not to multiply farther instances, let it be borne in mind, that not even the duty of prayer itself is exempt from this principle of triple relation. We have a commandment to "pray without ceasing," (1 Thes. v. 17); but we have a promise too, "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself," even "the Spirit of grace and supplications," "maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered," (Rom. viii. 26, and Zech. xii. 10); and the special prayer applicable in these circumstances, we learn from the example of the apostles, "Lord, teach us to pray," (Luke xi. 1).

In short, the Word of God is full\* of this important and beautiful arrangement. You will always find a promise adapted to the precept, and a prayer grounded on, and appropriate to them both.

Our intention, then, is to lead you to contemplate somewhat of the wisdom of God in this arrangement, to enquire into the practical spiritual purposes which it subserves, in the hands of the Divine Spirit, in awakening the soul and leading it to God, making good that paradox of grace which engrafts the most joyous hopefulness upon the convicted sinner's abject helplessness—the gracious Creator's strength being perfected in the guilty creature's weakness. In other words, let us examine the Divine economy of Precept, Promise, and Prayer, when brought powerfully into contact with the anxious and enquiring soul.

I. And, *first*, as to the Precept. What place does it hold in this ar-

\* Compare the following sets of texts, (Phil. ii. 12; Phil. ii. 13; 2 Thes. i. 11). (1 Cor. xvi. 13; 2 Cor. xii. 9; Ps. xx. 2). (Phil. iv. 4; Isa. lxi. 3; Ps. li. 12). (Isa. i. 16; Isa. i. 18; Psa. li. 2 and 7). (Eph. v. 14; both precept and promise; Psa. cxix. 25, or Ez. xxxvii. 9). (Jer. iii. 22, first clause; Matt. xviii. 11, 12; Ps. exix. 176).

rangement? What is its office? What good practical purposes does it serve?

“Make you a new heart and a new spirit.” At first sight this command may appear to be worse than useless. Does it not enjoin a thorough impossibility? The practical and the possible seem to be utterly put to flight? “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?” (Jer. xiii. 23.) “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one,” (Job xiv. 4.) “In me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing,” (Rom. vii. 18.) But surely the power to make a new heart and a new spirit is a good thing—one of the best of things, the most wonderful, the most glorious, the most holy. It belongs not to me. I am “dead in trespasses and in sins,” (Eph. ii. 1.) I have as little power to make a new heart as I had to create my living soul at first. My present heart can be of no use to me in this matter, for it is “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. I cannot even know it,” (Jer. xvii. 9.) The law of God can be of no use to me, for it cannot accomplish this holy achievement, in that it is “weak through the flesh,” (Rom. viii. 3), my fleshly heart being “enmity against it, not subject to it, neither indeed can it be,” (Rom. viii. 7.) The assistance of my neighbour can avail me nothing, for he cannot redeem himself, and as little can he help “by any means to redeem his brother. The redemption of my soul is precious, but it ceaseth for ever,” (Ps. xlix. 7, 8.) And, oh! surely this command is but a mockery of my helplessness? Is not this a cruel triumphing over my inability? What tendency can this have to remove the evil? Surely there is no step taken here to give a practical movement to my helpless soul.

Yes, there is. Your very meditations prove it. For

1. This command has evidently *made you conscious of your helplessness*, and I call that a practical movement, a very practical movement—an invaluable result—and the indispensable prerequisite to all others. Would your thoughts ever have been directed towards your helplessness at all, but for such commands as this? Would you ever have imagined your heart so wicked, so carnal, so polluted, so abominable as it is? Would you ever have imagined it such that it cannot be mended or improved at all, but must be altogether removed and replaced, but for this injunction, “Make you a *new* heart?” Would you ever have imagined that you had wandered so far from God, but for the loud voice in the distance behind you crying, “Return, return?” Would you ever have known how thoroughly your soul is paralyzed in spiritual death but for the command, “Arise from the dead?” (Eph. v. 14.) Would you ever have known how completely your senses are all sealed in spiritual sleep but for the authoritative voice of God? and even that, as you can

testify, only like a dying echo, through your dream, crying, "Awake, awake, thou that sleepest," (Ibid.) Say not that the precept is useless. If you have been aroused to earnest thought at all, the precept has already done you good service. If your meditations on this impracticable commandment—this "hard saying"—are at all honest and heartfelt, they are abundant testimony to the practical worth and working of the precept on your soul. It has led you to think of your helplessness. You have one invaluable lesson already. Follow on, for "to those that have shall be given." "Thank God and take courage." For,

2. This is not all that the precept can do for you. It will not only lead you to think of your weakness and helplessness, but it will tend to *show you how complete and thorough your impotency is, and to deepen the sense of this upon your soul.* For it will not do to have merely some vague and general idea of your inability; you must have a deep and pervading spiritual conviction of this truth. It must not be a matter of hearsay, but of actual experiment and experience. I can conceive a sick man confined to his couch, murmuring and fretting over the injunction of his physician, which prevents him from rising and walking through his chamber. He feels that he is indeed weak, but he knows not how much disease has debilitated his shattered frame; and he thinks it a hard restriction to be deprived of the liberty of trying his strength. If nothing else will convince him, let him get the proof of experience. Let permission be given him to walk across his chamber, and, as in the attempt he falls helpless into the arms of the friendly physician, whose wisdom he doubted, and whose advice he despised, he will at last acknowledge how thoroughly his strength has been prostrated. This is not to be supposed an accurate illustration in all points, for the natural man does not possess even those wretched remnants of strength which the case imagined involves—paralysis and even death itself are the favourite images of Scripture. Yet what I wish you to observe is, that in the sinner's spiritual experience, the command, "make you a new heart," holds a place and serves a purpose exactly similar to the permission given to the sick man to try the measure of his bodily powers. You may have some dim notions of your helplessness. But bring it to the test of experiment. This precept gives you the opportunity; nay, lays you under the obligation to do so. Go and try to make yourself a new heart. Labour to regenerate your own soul. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." And then tell your success. Break off every old habit, if you can. Give up every outward act of sin. Mortify the deeds of the body. But have you changed your heart? Have you given it new dispositions, new desires, new delights. In short, after labour the most painstaking, the most strenuous, the most unintermitting, have

you succeeded in yielding obedience to this commandment? Have you "made you a new heart and a new spirit?" No. But you have proved experimentally that it is wholly beyond your power. By the precept you have been taught experimentally what you but dimly surmised before, even your thorough, unmitigated, and hopeless helplessness. You had heard of that helplessness "by the hearing of the ear;" but now your whole soul feeleth it. You have now a far more deep and pervading and pressing conviction of this humbling truth; for the spiritual precept, and your efforts to obey it, have proved to you conclusively, because experimentally, that you are wholly "carnal, sold under sin," (Rom. vii. 14.) Is not this another practical movement? "I had not known sin but by the law," (Rom. vii. 7.) I had not felt my helplessness but by the precept.

3. But the precept can do you more service. It can originate another and perhaps a still more important practical movement. It may have already taught you how thoroughly helpless you are by nature. But this is not enough. Besides evoking the testimony of experience and consciousness, the precept *has power to touch the springs of conscience*; and without this it would indeed be utterly inefficient.

Let me commend the truth to your conscience in the sight of God, who searcheth the heart. With what *moral* feelings do you regard this thorough helplessness? Is it not the case that you regard it, or are at least continually tempted to regard it, more in the light of a melancholy misfortune, which makes you very much to be pitied, than as a heinous crime which makes you very much to be condemned? Is it not the case that you look upon yourselves chiefly as sufferers in this matter, and scarcely, if at all, as malefactors? Do you not think that your case calls more for sympathy than for blame—that you should rather be soothed than threatened. We appeal to you if this is not very often the cast and current of your meditations. Because you cannot obey this command, therefore you imagine you are not responsible for disobeying it—because you are thoroughly helpless, therefore you imagine you are as excusable. And thus the deceitful heart, ever tender to its own sores, and plausible in its own defence, contrives to shake itself clear of the irksome feeling of obligation to keep the impracticable commandment. In such circumstances, it is strange with what wretched sophistry conscience will submit to be baffled and silenced, and with what contradictory excuses its remonstrances are put away; so much so, that out of his own mouth the sinner may be condemned. "If we were only in more favourable circumstances, we might and would obey this precept; but as matters stand, with the whole head sick and the whole heart faint, with 'nothing in us but wounds and bruises and putrifying sores,' surely

we cannot be expected to come up to the high standard which this commandment sets before us." Now, in giving vent to such meditations as these (and it is to be feared they are not uncommon), do you really consider what you say? *If you were in more favourable circumstances, you would obey this precept?* What do you mean by *more favourable circumstances?* Your circumstances, spiritually considered, must be such that you have within you either the old heart or the new. No possible condition can be imagined between these two; and what, therefore, does this promise—so potent in silencing the conscience, and ending all debate, and putting all anxiety to flight—what does it amount to but simply this, that if you had the new heart already, you would then "make you a new heart and a new spirit"—you would do the work after it had been fully accomplished? Truly, if by such a proffer conscience were momentarily silenced, the deceitful heart ought in its turn to be thoroughly ashamed; and if these are its wretched delusions, it is surely high time it were for ever got rid of and replaced.

Do you still suggest that your helplessness sets you free from blame and responsibility? If you have any reverence for the Word of God, the precept ought at once to cure you of such perverse imaginings. For here you have the Lawgiver himself giving forth his deliverance on your case, and his utterance is in the form of a *command*. It is not an utterance of pity, or of sympathy, or of lamentation, over your prostrate impotency. The Lord does not say, at least *here* he does not say, Oh that you were able to make you a new heart and a new spirit. On the other hand, this is an utterance of authority. It is an unhesitating and peremptory injunction from the God who rules in righteousness. You may have begun perversely to imagine that your helplessness had removed you from under his authority, and beyond the limits of his government. But it is not so. He is still the God with whom you have to do; with whom you have to do, not as sufferers merely, but as subjects still; and, in testimony thereof, listen to the voice of his *commandment*, "make you a new heart and a new spirit." He comes to deal with you, not as *sufferers* whose *disease may* issue in death as its *result*, but as *rebels* whose *crime must* issue in death as its *doom*. He comes to tell you that you have not got beyond his dominions—that still he is your lawgiver and your judge. Could he be a judge at all, if rebellion carried you beyond his right and his power of judging? Could he be a lawgiver at all, if entitled to legislate only for the righteous? Nay; "the law is not made for a righteous man," but for exactly such as you, "for the lawless," (1 Tim. i. 9), for all those who, like you, are seeking freedom from the obligation of this very law, which commands you to "make a new heart and a new spirit." Surely, then, it is

miserable affectation for a guilty sinner to sorrow over his helplessness as a misfortune, and then to think that all that can be expected of him is discharged, and he is responsible for nothing more. Let him learn rather to tremble over this helplessness as a crime, the very fountain-head and cause of all crimes.

Is this demand said to be unreasonable? This might be pleaded if there could be two opinions as to the source of our inability to obey, but not if it springs from our perverse and irrepressible and willing habit of doing evil—not if we are incapable of making a new heart, because our natural hearts have not only shown symptoms of enmity to God, but are very enmity itself. Is it possible for any one to affirm that the very depth of our iniquity, and the uniformity of our criminal habits, must set us free from the charge of all crime? Is it possible that the consciences of men can be so perverted and debauched? No: not so long as they are found “the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another,” (Rom. ii. 14). Suppose it possible for some man, some monster in human form, to acquire the habit of murder, so that he could not refrain from assassinating every victim that crossed his path—that by habit, and a monstrous love for blood, he had become utterly incapable of obeying the commandment, “Thou shalt not kill”—would any one tell me that this man’s inability to obey excused him from the penalty of disobeying? Would not the doom of death be sealed upon this human fiend, amidst the loud execrations of outraged humanity? And is the case any different, or less urgent, when the just and righteous King of Glory sits in judgment? Shall his high and righteous bar be degraded by the admission of a plea which would be scouted as insane at a human tribunal? Shall the very strength of the grasp which the law has over the rebellious heart be pleaded as a reason why the lawgiver should abdicate his throne, and denude himself of all his claims? Nay, verily: not to obey is itself a crime—not to be able to obey is a second, rivetting and fastening the first as with iron. Rather it is a habit of crime plunging the soul in a sea of guilt.

Thus, then, the office of the precept is most vital and important. It first of all informs the sinner that all is not well, and points to the seat of the disease. Then it leads him experimentally to a knowledge of his miserable condition, his thorough helplessness and inability to save himself. And lastly, it presses on his conscience a deep feeling of his responsibility and criminality. Thus he learns much of himself, and he learns much of the God with whom he has to do. He is taught to feel his own weakness and worthlessness. He is taught, also, God’s authority and power. He is led to see his thorough subjection to the Heavenly Majesty, and his not less thorough incapacity to do the duties



of a subject. You may have been "alive without the precept once, but when the precept comes in spiritual power, sin revives and you die," (Rom. vii. 9). You die to all pride, and peace, and hope. You learn two solemn truths, which, when taken together, give you no rest till they mercifully shut you up to the only remedy. You know your helplessness; but you cannot sit down contented, for you know also your obligation and responsibility. You know your obligation; but you do not become legalists, for you know also your helplessness. You feel that you cannot obey; but this does not set all at rest, because you feel that you must obey. You feel that you must obey; but neither does this settle all, for you also feel that you cannot. It is "as if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him," (Amos v. 19). "Fear, and the pit, and the snare, are upon thee, O inhabitant of the earth. And it shall come to pass, that he that fleeth from the noise of the fear shall fall into the pit, and he that cometh out of the midst of the pit shall be taken in the snare," (Is. xxiv. 17, 18). In neither can you remain. You struggle from the pit of helplessness, because you feel you are bound over to obedience. You avoid the snare of legalism, because you know you cannot render the obedience required. Oh! what a source of unspeakable spiritual agony is there here! And so must it still remain, while the "inhabitant of the earth" looks not beyond the earth for deliverance. But look up, and lift up the head, O wearied sinner,—look away from thyself; long enough has that poor self of thine agonized thee—truly thou wilt find no help there. Look "up unto the hills whence cometh thine aid;" and then, baffled with thy weak and helpless attempts to "make thee a new heart and a new spirit," and prostrated, too, with the thought that it must be done, turn now from the terrible precept and listen, "Be still and know that it is God." Thus saith the Lord, "A new heart also will I give thee, and a new spirit will I put within thee."

## II. We come, then, to the consideration of the Promise.

1. And, *in the first place*, it is obvious that the *wisdom* of God is wonderfully exhibited in bringing in the promise at this precise point. If it had come sooner, the soul would not have been prepared to receive it. If it had come later, the soul would have been already given over to hopeless despair. The promise cannot go before the precept, for then the soul would not feel the need of it, and consequently its value would not be appreciated; and the promise cannot come after the prayer, for then prayer would have no foundation on which to ground her supplication. But the Lord, who knoweth the spirits which he hath made,

and who "knoweth what is in man, and needeth not that any should testify unto him," (John ii. 25), seeth the end of a spiritual conflict from the beginning, and all the parts thereof in their order; and he comes in with his separate dealings at the proper time, and at the proper point. Thus, when the precept has done the preparatory work in righteous authority, the promise begins to reign on the throne of meekness and of mercy. The precept, like affliction, "may not have seemed joyous, but rather grievous; nevertheless it hath wrought the" humbling "fruits of righteousness," preparatory to the gifts of mercy, "in them that have been rightly exercised thereby," (Heb. xii. 11). The reign of the precept, if we look not beyond it—if we regard it as an end—may have been a reign of terror. Viewed, however, as a means, as the prerequisite merely to the "better things to be revealed," it has indeed been the reign of grace begun, although the grace as yet has been concealed. But now "the better things themselves" are brought to us by the promise. If the precept could have brought these things, "if that first covenant had," in this respect, "been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second," no room for the promise. But because the precept has a tantalizing "shadow" only "of the good things to come, and not the very image of these things," because it can never "make the comers thereunto perfect"—because "the law can make nothing perfect"—therefore "there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before, for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof," to make way for "the bringing in of a better hope"—"he taketh away the first that he may establish the second;" and what the precept "cannot do, in that it is weak through the flesh, God" through his own Son can do, by the "promise, which in him is yea and amen." (Compare Heb. vii. 18, 19, viii. 6-13, x. 1-9; Rom. viii. 3). Is the precept then useless? No, by no means. "Is it then against the promise of God? God forbid; for if there had been" a precept "given which could have given life, verily righteousness" and a new heart "should have been by" that precept. "Wherefore then serveth the" precept? "It was added because of transgressions," and nature's helplessness, "till the seed should come to whom the promise was made." And its indispensable and blessed, though painful work, is this—that it "hath concluded all under sin" and helplessness, and proved this in their own experience and to their own consciences, "that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before" the promise "came we were kept under the" precept, "shut up unto the" promise "which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the" precept "was our schoolmaster, to

bring us to " the promise, and to him who is " the surety of a covenant established upon better promises," " that we might be justified by faith." (See Gal. iii. 19-24.)

Thus there is the economy of a Mosaic dispensation, carried on preparatory to that of a Christian dispensation, in God's dealings with every regenerated soul, as truly and really as in the history of the collective church. This preparation in the church was not more necessary than it is in the individual heart; and just as there was a Divine wisdom seen in emancipating the Church from the " tutors and governors," at " the time appointed of the Father," when " he sent forth his Son," so there is a " fulness of the time " in the history of every believing sinner when God sends forth his promise, even the promised Spirit of his Son, into the heart, as faithfully as he sent forth his Son into the world, emancipating the despairing soul as fully in the one case from the grievous bondage of the precept, as he freed his people in the other from those beggarly elements, and from that " yoke of bondage which neither they nor their fathers were able to bear." In the days of Moses, the Church was not ready for the simplicity, the liberty, the manliness, and the spirituality of the Christian dispensation. And so, at the opening of the soul's spiritual discipline, by reason of its childish ignorance and wayward pride, God introduces a dispensation of precept first; and when this has accomplished the work whereunto he sent it, at the proper point, and at the proper time, he brings in his dispensation of promise. " Surely this also cometh forth from the Lord of Hosts, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working."

2. How is the *grace* of God adored by the fainting soul, when, after the conflict with the precept, the promise comes brightly into view. The *wisdom* of God is seen in the promise, coming in at the very time when it was needed. But the *grace* of God is glorified in bringing in the very gift which was needed. " Make thee a new heart and a new spirit," says the precept. " Ah," replies the sinner, " that is not in my power;" I am carnal; sold under " sin," " dead in trespasses and in sins." I cannot frame my heart otherwise than it hath been formed by iniquity. " I am as an unclean thing, and all my righteousnesses are as filthy rags. I do fade as a leaf, and my iniquities, like the wind, have taken me away," (Is. lxiv. 6). " A deceived heart hath turned me aside that I cannot deliver my soul," (Is. xlv. 20. In this helpless state is it a partial promise that is given? Is it a greater earnestness to try the work ourselves, that God offers to communicate? Does he promise to help us out with the laborious achievement, if we will arise and put our hand to the work ourselves? Does he engage to fill up or supplement our deficiencies? Does he offer to overlook our failures, if only our at-

tempt shall be sincere? Oh no! These may be the doctrines of a wretched Arminianism. These may be the desires of a half-humbled soul. But they are not the promises of God. These would be boons of little value; they would tend to no practical result, no saving issue. There would indeed be mockery in promises like these; for the very condition on which such offers are supposed to be made, never could be realised in us till the whole work were done. But the very thing that we cannot make for ourselves, God promises unconditionally to bestow, freely to bestow, without condition, without money, and without price. The precept having done its painful work, seems, as it were, recalled, and the form being annulled, but the whole substance retained, it once more returns in the form and the language of peace and hope and joy. Like the same law given to Moses a second time, not amidst thunderings and lightnings, and darkness, and tempest, but amidst light, and peace, and favour, all God's goodness passing by before his servant, sheltered now in the cleft of the rock; so here, the preceptive form, which caused the tempest and the terror in the soul, being all done away, the very same substance, in all its integrity, is restored, but now beaming in the light and lustre of a free and a gracious promise, "A new heart will I give unto you, a new spirit will I put within you." It is the very thing required, without restriction and without abatement, offered freely and without condition, without money and without price.

3. But the *grace* of God is still more wonderfully glorified by the consideration, that, while this is the very thing which we need, and which God offers to bestow upon us, it is also the very thing which we are bound to render unto Him. And here, again, the good fruits of the precept as the forerunner of the promise come clearly into view. The precept teaches that we need this, for it teaches us experimentally our want and our helplessness. But when it teaches our responsibility, our obligation to make us a new heart and a right spirit, our crime and our guilt in not doing so, then we see, not the depth of wretchedness and misery merely, but the essence of rebellion, in our inability. Oh! when the responsibility is really felt, as well as the helplessness, how does the manifold grace of God grow before the view of the admiring soul! If I feel that I would be better if I had a new heart, and, at the same time, feel my utter incapacity to make me a new heart and a right spirit, how gracious in the great God to come and offer me the very thing I need—the very thing that I cannot do without! But when, besides this, I feel my deep and unchangeable responsibility to make this new heart which yet I cannot make—when I feel my criminality in delaying every moment to do it, and my criminality in being unable to do it at all, either now or at any future time, oh! how shall I speak, then

of that grace which pities both my weakness and my guilt, and delivers me most fully from the death bringing consequences of both. It was much when he "looked upon me in my low estate;" but it was more when he looked upon me in my lost estate. It was great grace when he, "in due time," pitied me as a weak and helpless sufferer, "yet without strength," (Rom. v. 6); but it was greater far when he pitied me as a daring rebel, "a sinner, an enemy;" (v. 8-10.) Grace abounded when, sympathizingly, he gave me that new heart which I was unable to make; but grace much more abounded when, forgivingly, he gave me that new heart which I was bound to make, and guilty in my inability to make it. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, for he *healeth* all thy *diseases*; he also *forgiveth* all thine *iniquities*," Ps. ciii. 2, 3.

4. And now the *sovereignty* of Divine grace can be obscured or concealed no longer. This also the believer is taught to feel and to acknowledge by reason of his previous discipline under the precept. In learning his obligation and responsibility, he at the same time necessarily learned the majesty and kingly authority of God. We have seen that the precept teaches not only the soul's utter helplessness, but also the soul's entire subjection to the righteous justice of the Lawgiver. We are made to feel completely in God's power. We are exposed to his righteous anger, and incapable of effecting our deliverance from threatened wrath. The Lord maintains his right to command, though we have lost our power to obey. Whatever impotency we are groaning under, he is seen to reign as king. He has the destinies of all souls at his own free, unchallenged disposal. He is the Sovereign God: righteous in forsaking all if he will—righteous in pouring out wrath unto the uttermost. What an overpowering dignity is seen in his sovereign majesty, his uncontrollable right and power! How exalted above all created excellence! How full of uncreated, all-governing glory—a glory terrible indeed, if no grace is mingled with it! But if this high Sovereign shall give his gracious promise, then how resplendent is his *sovereign* grace? If He who is the God of all majesty, and excellency, and dignity, and sovereign glory,—if He, who ruleth among the armies above, and the inhabitants of this earth below, free and uncontrolled in all his ways, and in all his purposes—if He, who is the sovereign disposer of ten thousand times ten thousand angels, and who is sovereign over *me*, as his precept and commandment do fully prove—if He, who as such a sovereign hath the fullest right to execute on me wrath even to the uttermost—if He shall single out and distinguish me from among the mass of helpless, dying, daring rebels, and glorying in his words, shall cry in my astonished and delighted ear, "I, even I,

am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own name's sake," and as "I am that I am," "a new heart will I give unto thee, and a new spirit will I put within thee,"—oh! how shall my grateful but too straitened soul ever realize, or comprehend with all saints this mystery of sovereign grace, all made mine in the free and gracious promise of a sovereign God! Wondrous and adorable sovereignty of my God! I quarrel with it no more—I hail it with rejoicing. The Lord is my Sovereign; "the Lord is my Lawgiver; the Lord is my King;" as such "He will save me," (Isa. xxxiii. 22). None can deny his right. Who shall condemn when the Sovereign God hath justified? (Rom. viii. 33). None can resist his power. "Who shall stay his hand from working? Who shall say unto him what doest thou? How powerful, how authoritative is the grace of this holy Judge—the Sovereign King of Zion!

Behold then, O my soul, how God, by giving thee his precept, first prepares thee for his promise—opens thine eyes to behold his wisdom, enables thee to see his grace, his multitude of tender mercies, begets in thee a deep sense of his righteous authority, which, when the promise comes, is transferred with all its sovereign majesty, to that redeeming love which then excels in glory, and shines forth in dignity and splendour. Thus the creature is abased, and the sovereign God is exalted, and no flesh can glory in his presence. Thus there is glory to God in the highest, and grace to men. The grace is compassed with sovereign glory, and the glory is full of sovereign grace. "O Lord, we beseech thee shew us thy glory!" Fulfil to us thy gracious promise! "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

III. We have already made use of the Prayer. Indeed we are brought almost insensibly to the third and last link of this beautiful chain—the last line of this threefold cord.

And now, the office which prayer performs in this divine and spiritual economy, will be obvious to all. It appropriately comes last, because it is grounded on, and takes its warrant from the promise, pleading the fulfilment of the promise that thereby the object of the precept may be gained. The prayer, when offered, grows out of the promise; the prayer, when answered, satisfies the precept. The precept teaches man that he is helpless; the promise tells him there is help; the prayer secures the help. The precept teaches man that he is responsible and guilty; the promise tells him there is forgiveness; the prayer obtains the pardon. The precept teaches man God's authority; the promise tells of God's grace; the prayer tries and tests God's sufficiency. The precept teaches man his dependence; the promise declares dependence in God well

placed ; the prayer puts dependence on God accordingly. The precept teaches man humility ; the promise gives man hope ; the prayer shews man's trust. The precept gives scope for God's righteous justice ; the promise gives scope for God's faithfulness ; the prayer gives scope for man's faith. In all cases, the prayer is necessary to complete the cycle ; and if the precept and the promise do but graciously exercise the soul, the prayer will and cannot but follow. He who listens to the precept and feels his need, his helplessness, his responsibility, his crime, and then listens to the promise, " counting him faithful who hath promised, who also will do it,"—that man will and must have recourse to the prayer. He is shut up to prayer by every principle in his nature, by his sin and misery, by reason and conscience, by fear and hope. He must pray. He cannot help it. He is carried captive to prayer by a blessed necessity, a willing and therefore victorious and joyful necessity.

To the prayerless, therefore, there is here very clear and simple ground for self-examination and self-condemnation. Dear brethren, matters must stand thus with you ; you have received aright neither the precept nor the promise of your God ; for they always bring the prayer along with them. No man can put asunder what God hath joined ; and therefore if you are living in the habitual neglect of earnest prayer, it must be because you have listened proudly to the precept, faithlessly to the promise. You are quarrelling with the precept, and denying your helplessness ; and herein you falsify the word of God, your own experience, and the experience of all the saints and the spirits of just men made perfect. Or you are denying your responsibility and God's authority, " casting his cords away from you," and saying " Who is the Lord, that we should serve him ?" Or you are quarrelling with the promise ; either contemning his wisdom by counting his promise worthless, or contemning his faithfulness by insinuating that his truth will fail. One or other of these fearful alternatives you must choose, if you are not habitually plying the throne of grace with prayer ; and perhaps the guilt of all these crimes together is cleaving to your consciences. Oh how unprovoked and how God-provoking must be the sin of prayerless lives ! Only think how beautifully God has prepared the way for prayer. How much wisdom has he lavished upon this gracious arrangement ! How safely and how gently has he contrived to carry you step by step to his throne of grace ! The precept tells you that you must obey. Even God himself cannot release you from that. It is a painful lesson ; yet is it not well to know it, while hope yet remains, that it may become a practical lesson ! It is mercy in God to speak out ere all hope is gone. The precept tells you of your helplessness, convinces you of this expe-

rimentially when you attempt to obey it, and find that you cannot "make a new heart and a new spirit." Surely it is good to know this truth also. Your ignorance of it would not make it less true, and your knowledge of it will at least turn you away from a fruitless source of labour, and should make you willing to try a "more excellent way" if it can be shewn you. And that this can be done you need not doubt; for the promise now comes in to show that all may yet infallibly be well, pledging immutable things to your full deliverance and your eternal safety. "What could have been done more to his vineyard that he hath not done to it?" (Isa. v. 4). Will you turn it all into contempt? Nay, rather, I should say, will you yourselves become a contempt and a hissing to all passers-by, through indolence, or pride, or unbelief, or any other miserable habit of your wretched hearts, the very presence of which should only add wings to your haste, and fervour to your prayer. What! shall God do so much for miserable guilty rebels, and will you do nothing, absolutely nothing for yourselves? Will you not even arise and call upon your God for mercy? How *can* we persuade you? What arguments remain wherewith to ply you? To the authoritative voice of the taskmaster, and the pleasant voice of the charmer, ye are alike deaf. Ye are like sullen "children in the market-place." By the precept we "have mourned unto you and ye have not lamented;" by the promise we "have piped unto you and ye have not danced." One word more, and may the Lord bless it to your souls. Your guilt is now tremendous, because your case is now made so hopeful; and your case is thus hopeful because you have so little to do. Yea, you have only to plead with God to do *all* the work to your hands. Will you cast away eternal joy and court eternal agony by refusing *that*?

How calculated are these imperfect meditations to encourage the hearts of those who are Israelites indeed, princes with God in prayer! Let the precept, and the promise, and the prayer, be alike precious to you, and have your souls disciplined by a due attention to them all. Never think you can obey the precept in your own strength. Never think that your interest in the promise sets you free from the authority of the precept. Never think that prayer can supersede either the precept or the promise. Prayer is presumption except when grounded on the promise. Prayer is hypocrisy except with a view to the obedience of the precept. In all thy ways, diligently search for the pure precepts of thy God, crying evermore, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Fear not for thy weakness to know thy duty, though it should be thine in Divine command to remove mountains, "Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain, for he shall bring



forth the headstone with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace, unto it," (Zec. iv. 7.) "His grace shall be sufficient for thee," (2 Cor. xii. 9.) His promise is, that "as thy day, so shall thy strength be," (Deut. xxxiii. 25.) "Yet for all this will he be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them," (Ez. xxxvi. 37.) Therefore, let thy duty, and thy weakness, and thy cheering promise, send thee to the throne, for "grace to help in thy time of need," (Heb. iv. 16) "Put him in remembrance," (Is. xliii. 26), saying, "Remember the words unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope," (Ps. cxix. 49.) Then "Fear not thou worm Jacob; thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small." (Is. xli. 41.)

## S E R M O N C X X .

THE PILLAR CLOUD OF ISRAEL—CHRIST THE LEADER OF HIS CHURCH.\*

BY THE REV. JOSEPH PATRICK, A.M., OCHILTREE.

“And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way, and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light, to go by day and night. He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.”—Exodus xiii. 21, 22.

“And the Lord will create upon every dwelling-place of Mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for upon all the glory shall be a defence.”—Isa. iv. 5.

It was good for the Israelites that they were so long in the wilderness. There the most impressive intimations of a present Deity followed their every step. The most extraordinary events become daily occurrences. Miracles were wrought to feed them when hungry, and to satisfy their thirsty souls. Look downward, day by day the ground is strewed with wholesome food. The wilderness does not produce the supply. It comes down direct from heaven. And Jesus was in the manna—“I am the living bread which came down from heaven.” Look upward; it is the lofty rock of Horeb. Water gushes forth from its side in copious streams. And Jesus was in that rock—“that rock was Christ.” Look upward, till your view is bounded by the blue vault of heaven. *There*, in the form of a vast column of mingled fire and smoke, is the mysterious yet faithful guide of the Lord's people. When it is stationary, they rest; when it advances, they journey. It is many ages since the miracle was wrought, but its spiritual import is ever new. The pillar-cloud is the perpetual property of the Christian Church—the Church can no more lose its invisible guide than it can lose its own existence. For the pillar-cloud was typical of Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ ever liveth as the Church's prophet, priest, and king. Thus the narrative of Moses beautifully harmonizes with Isaiah's prediction. “And the Lord will create upon every dwelling-place of Mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night, for upon all the glory shall be a defence,” (Isa. iv. 5). If the pillar-cloud was the shadow of good things to come, Jesus Christ is the glorious substance; and in the following discourse we shall endea-

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your to shew by what agency, or in what manner, the Redeemer leads his Church.

I. *In the first place, Jesus leads the Church by his Word.*

The Scriptures, which are the word of Christ, contain a full and infallible revelation of God's will, and furnish the supreme and sole standard of man's faith and practice. This position is boldly denied by many. If we look at Papists with their traditions, or Quakers with their inward light, or if we look at sceptics and infidels, who boast of the sufficiency of human reason, we find that in all ages men have been extremely reluctant to acknowledge and submit to the supremacy of the Bible. And it is none of the least of the advantages resulting from the position which the Free Church has been compelled to assume, that the doctrine of the sovereign authority of the word has been so clearly set forth, and so prominently kept before the mind of Christendom.

Had the Israelites in the wilderness two pillar clouds, or had they only one? They had one guide. The stately column was composed of two elements—the smoke and the fire—but the pillar cloud was one. Even so in Christ there were two natures, Deity and Humanity, but these subsisting in one glorious person. Having one guide in their journey, the pilgrims were bound to look to it alone. Moses had no right and claimed none, to propose himself as a rival authority. I ask, then, how would the people have acted, if some one had said, “there is a moving mass of vapour arising from the earth—yonder is a meteor gleaming in the heavens—there is a comet pursuing its erratic course—yonder is a star whose twinkling light greets us from afar—these are thy guides, O Israel.” Would there not have been one simultaneous indignant reply from the thousands of Israel? These are blind guides—to follow them is to fall into the ditch, to stumble and perish. We have *one* and but *one* infallible guide, by its light we have walked hitherto, and it has never deceived us, and henceforth, wherever it leads, there shall we follow. Nor more certainly was there *one pillar-cloud* than there is *one Bible*. The word stands alone in its authority. It is the sole director of our faith, it is the sole regulator of our walk. The word is the sole standard in all matters pertaining to the worship of God, and if human opinions or imperial statutes should oppose its high demands, “we must obey God rather than men.”

In these days, the danger to our religious principles is no slight danger. It is great and imminent. New errors are raising their heads, or rather old ones are reviving in new forms, and with new zeal on the part of their advocates. If all error is the antagonist of truth, all forms of false worship must be contrary to the word of God. Let the Bible

be every where held not only in all its integrity, but in all its authority ; let it be held as the sole arbiter from whose decision there is no appeal, and Satan will tremble for the stability of his kingdom. The errors of Popery, and of Puseyism, its handmaid, will be exposed ; the inward light of Quakerism will be exploded ; Erastianism, introducing an earthly element into the government of Christ's Church, will be unmasked and condemned ; infidel boastings touching the might and mastery of human reason will be found hollow and baseless, if we resolutely follow the light shining from the pages of the sacred volume. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path," Psalm cxix. 105. "We have a more sure word of prophecy ; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in our hearts." 2 Peter i. 19.

## II. *In the second place, Jesus leads the Church by his Spirit.*

How precious the promise which he made to his disciples while ye was yet present with them ! "But the Comforter, who is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you." John xiv. 26. The Word is a lamp to the feet, and a light to the path ; but what if the hands of men are so feeble that they cannot hold the heaven-sent lamp ? What if the darkness which shrouds their minds is so dense, that all the rays shining from the Word serve only to render the darkness visible ? In such circumstances, how desirable to have a living guide to expound the infallible directory ! How important the aid of that celestial agent who strengthens the weak hands and confirms the feeble knees, who teaches us, as he taught Ephraim, to go, "leading us by the arms !" How important the office of the Holy Spirit, who, when we are in danger, through very feebleness, of letting the word drop from our hands, holds it up before our eyes that we may see it ; and who, more than this, causes the light of that lamp to flash upon the inner man of our hearts ! 2 Cor. iv. 6.

Here we may observe how far the New Testament dispensation excels the old ; "for even that which was glorious had no glory in this respect by reason of the glory that excelleth." Far be it from us to make light of the ancient types and ceremonies. They were valuable, but their value lay chiefly in this, that they were shadows of good things to come. The cloud which was in the tabernacle by day, and the fire by night, formed a guiding pillar, but for which the people of Israel must have wandered and lost their way in the desert. Yet there was an imperfection arising from its very nature. The fiery pillar taught seeing men where to go ; but it could not give sight to the blind. It pointed to

the direction in which the pilgrims were to advance ; but it could not make the lame man leap as an hart. The radiance of the fire, attempered by the smoke, was cheering and refreshing to the eye ; but it could do nothing to scatter the deep shades of moral darkness which brooded over the minds of the unregenerate. We do not say that the Spirit of Christ did not impart inward light, saving knowledge, in the days of Moses. By no means. Wherever holiness adorned any character, He, the Sanctifier, was its source. But, under a preparatory dispensation, which gave such prominence to the visible and the carnal, there was great danger that the invisible and the spiritual should be too little heeded. And the crowning excellence of the New Testament economy is, that it is the dispensation of the Spirit. While it does not dispense with forms it specially inculcates the power of godliness. While it commends the word, it holds the word to be powerless without the Spirit of God. And Jesus Christ, the Church's leader, using the word as his lamp to light men in the way to heaven, renders its instrumentality effectual by the accompanying agency of the Holy Ghost. Christ's conduct of the Church is not simply an external convoy like the pillar cloud which kept itself apart from those whom it guided. Christ leads not only externally or instrumentally by his word, but *inwardly* and *efficiently* by his Spirit.

The Free Church has been honoured to fight a good fight for the supremacy of the Word, as the standard of our faith and practice. And we may congratulate you, dear brethren, on the completed erection of this sanctuary as a public and permanent monument of your attachment to certain great principles which, because they are truth, neither minister nor people may sell for any price. But let no office-bearer or member of the Free Church think that he has done enough in asserting the authority of the Bible as the law of Christ's house. Whatever may be your veneration for the Word—and you cannot value it too highly, for it is more precious than gold, yea than much fine gold—see to it that by the Word as your lamp you find Christ himself the centre of all its doctrines—the sum of all its promises—the substance of all its blessings. And with Christ as your leader, his spirit will not only shine upon the *word* but *into your hearts*. If ye are Christ's, the Holy Spirit will take up his abode in you, and then yours will be a noble convoy. First of all, the Spirit opens the Scripture to the understanding ; its difficulties he removes ; its seeming paradoxes he reconciles ; its very mysteries he renders less mysterious, for he throws around them such a halo of divinity as to overbear all cavils and silence all doubts. But, secondly, the Holy Spirit opens the understanding to understand the Holy Scriptures. His work is not only *objective* or *external*, it is *subjective, internal*. The sinner, divinely taught, sees truth with new eyes. It seemed

a far off thing before ; it is very near, close to him now. He beholds God's will in the light of God's sanctuary. And thus to learn is to practise ; such knowledge is life eternal. If Jesus is your teacher, his spirit will not only make the path plain before you, but will enable you to walk therein. With so infallible a guide, the wilderness will lose much of its desolation and dangers ; and the dark valley, unrobed of its gloom, will become the antechamber and threshold to an eternal palace—the seat of bliss, because the abode of the ever-blessed God.

### III. *In the third place, Jesus leads the Church by his providence.*

Even with a good lamp or lanthorn, and a faithful guide, a man will not make progress in his journey without *a way*. Without a way he is at a stand. Of what avail that the clearest light shines upon him, if there is no solid standing beneath his feet ? Now, while the word of Christ furnishes the lamp, while the spirit of Christ forms the living and faithful guide, the *providence of Christ, as pioneer, prepares a path for the pilgrim to walk in*. The pillar-cloud was useful to the Israelites in the desert, not because it formed, but because it shone upon their path. And here the leading of a gracious Providence was conspicuous. Jeremiah gives a vivid description of the wilderness, as “a land of deserts and of pits, a land of drought and of the shadow of death, a land that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt.” Now, had not the Lord been very merciful to his people, the pits might have been so many and so deep as to be impassable ; and the drought so intense as to be intolerable. The good providence of God alone rendered it possible for them to find a path through the wilderness : and herein was the peculiar excellence of the pillar of cloud and fire, that it pointed out the path which the providence of God had formed.

The Saviour whom we adore, the Son of God, is ruler of all worlds. Supreme in heaven, he is not less so on earth. The author of salvation, he is the mainspring and regulator of all the countless and complicated wheels of Providence. Providence is a volume which is often hard to be understood. It has its dark chapters, through which it is not easy to find our way. Providence has its strange incidents, which baffle all our ingenuity to explain. It has its knots, so deeply twisted and so firmly bound, that common observers cannot untie them. And the reason why we put providence after the Word and Spirit of Christ is, that no man is able to explain Providence aright until he has studied the *word*, and been taught by the spirit of the Lord. There is nothing in which men are so apt to err as in their interpretation of Providence. “Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the mighty waters, and thy footsteps are not known.” (Psalm lxxvii. 19.) “And I will bring the blind by a way

that they know not. I will lead them in paths which they have not known." (Isaiah xlii. 16). How descriptive of the ways of Providence! They are often contrary to all that human wisdom could have anticipated. To the Israelites in the desert, the path which was pointed out by the pillar-cloud, was as if it had been in the sea—beyond their ken. They were led, like blind men, by a way which they knew not. And yet, when they reached the promised land, they found no reason for murmuring. The way had been long and circuitous, rough and painful, yet they were constrained to acknowledge that it was "a right way." And how stands the case with believers in New Testament times? Our pillar-cloud may shine upon many a scene of gloom and peril—it may lead us among briars and thorns, or hard by deep pits and frightful precipices—it may herald us through the midst of habitations of dragons, and dens of devils, fiends incarnate. Yet, let us be of good cheer, while the voice of our Commander sounds in our ears—"speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward." And sure we are, that if we enter the land of rest and immortality, then, in looking back on each successive stage of the way by which Providence has been leading us through the wilderness, there will be nothing to complain of, unless it be that we were so reluctant to follow where the Lord was saying—"This is the way, walk ye in it." The inhabitants of the heavenly Canaan will gratefully acknowledge that, with all their trials, they have been bountifully dealt with. Instead of murmuring because they bore a cross so heavy, they will shout with joy for wearing a crown so bright. Instead of complaining that the way was so rough, they will praise the Lord that the end of the way is so pleasant and glorious, "and he led us forth by the right way that we might go to a city of habitation."

In conclusion, the pillar cloud presents a very different aspect, according as we view it from the army of the Egyptians, or the camp of the Israelites. If you are sinners, the cloudy pillar turns its dark side to you, as it did to Pharaoh and his host when they were drowned in the Red Sea. In the cloud and fire, you behold only images of terror, instruments of vengeance. "Clouds and darkness are round about Him, righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His throne. "A fire goeth before Him, and burneth up His enemies round about at the last day." Jesus shall come with clouds, and He shall come with devouring fire, taking vengeance on them who know not God, and who obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Sinners, how will it stand with you then? What will your doom be? If you live and die enemies to God in your minds, and by wicked works, you must be judged as enemies, and your eternity must be spent in the company of the devil

and his angels. Look unto Jesus, embrace Him, cleave to Him as your only Saviour. Then the darkness which shrouds your prospects will be dispersed. Then condemnation will cease, every accuser will be silenced, the devil will be cast down, and the world overcome. Then saints will be your brethren, and God himself your Father, and heaven your eternal and happy home.

Believers, ye view the pillar cloud from the camp of the Israelites, and it presents its bright side to you. It is to you an object not of terror but of pleasing contemplation. Follow your heavenly guide. You are on your march, on every side is the wilderness. Behind you is Egypt, an evil world; before you is the River Jordan, the dark and tempestuous river of death, which you must cross. Yonder in the distance is the better country, the heavenly Canaan, on whose shores, if you are permitted to stand, you shall receive a great reward, in the enjoyment of which you shall forget all the tears you have shed, and all the trials you have endured. Rejecting all false guides, regard Jesus alone as your leader and commander. Where our New Testament pillar cloud leads, be it yours to follow. When Jesus calls, be it yours to listen to his voice, to obey his commands. The Israelites in the wilderness were followers of the cloud; believers ye are followers of the Lamb. "These are they who follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth." Follow him fully, avoiding all sinful compromise between duty and interest. Follow him fearlessly, He will vindicate his own cause. "Fear not them who kill the body." Follow him perseveringly. "If any man draw back, my soul hath no pleasure in him." Following the Lamb on earth, you shall reign with him in heaven. There pillar clouds are no longer needed, while lamps and candles no longer send forth their feeble rays. When sun, and moon, and stars, no longer adorn the firmament—all lesser lights are superseded when the light of the world, the Sun of Righteousness, shines with unclouded splendour. "And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it; for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof."



## LECTURE XXXIII

THE BELIEVER'S LOVE TO THE SAVIOUR.

BY THE REV. B. FRANKLIN GREIG, KINFAUNS.

“Whom having not seen, ye love: in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.”—1 PETER I. 8.

IN former discourses on this passage, we considered successively, according as is here laid down, first, the *fountain-head* and *source* of the blessed hope here spoken of; secondly, the *inheritance* hoped for; thirdly, the *character* of the persons for whom it is provided; and, fourthly, the *circumstances of their present condition*, as exposed to temptations, and always in great heaviness while still rejoicing, and that all the more on account of their troubles and trials. We come now to consider their feelings toward that glorious person through whom they obtain this blissful possession.

The inheritance itself is only hoped for, and therefore is, in all respects, an object of faith, being real to the mind only in so far as the mind is under the influence of this principle. But the hope which is cherished regarding it is one that is lively, and of which we need not be ashamed, being of such a character as to serve the purpose of an actually present existing thing to the mind that entertains it, faith being “the evidence of things not seen, the substance of things hoped for.” So also Christ Jesus, through whom this inheritance is procured, and who is the object consequently of the love here spoken of, is absent and unseen by the eye of sense. The same faith, however, makes his presence real; and, though we see him not, yet believing in him, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. And well may we thus rejoice and be confident that our faith is not groundless, for even already we are made to feel that we have the end of our faith, the salvation of our souls. This, as a present possession, we already in part have. We know ourselves no more to be strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God. “Because we are sons God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into us, crying, Abba Father.” It is not entirely a distant thing, therefore, in which we rejoice. We have already an earnest of it. So that sense, if we may say so, comes in to the assistance of faith, and we seem to ourselves even to have a sensible evidence of the existence near us of him whom we love, just as at times, in our seasons of

close fellowship with him, we seem already to have entered upon the inheritance undefiled. But let us not anticipate. We have to consider,

I. The feelings which the true believer cherishes towards this glorious object of his faith. These feelings are here comprehensively summed up in the term *love*—a word of various import as used in Scripture. It is employed to express both the mind and heart of God, and the feelings and affections of man. As applied to God, it signifies sometimes *complacency*, sometimes *approval*, and sometimes *pity*. Of the first of these uses, we have an example in John iii. 35, “The Father loveth the Son;” of the second in Psalm cxlvi. 8, “The Lord loveth the righteous;” of the third in John iii. 16, “God so loved the world,” &c. But when the word is used to express the feelings of man toward God, of course only the first of these senses can belong to it; and the same also if it be used to indicate, as here, the mind of the believer toward Christ. It is moreover a complacency of a peculiar kind, made up of several distinct elements, or rather, we should say, it is characterised by several distinct features. Some of these we shall point out. And,

1st, We say that the love of the believer toward Christ is a *devout, an adoring* love; for it is the love of the creature to the Creator. It brings him, therefore, to his knees in lowly reverence, and fills his soul with holy yet humble sentiments of admiring homage. Of itself, this feature of his love would lead the believer to stand at a distance, and, forbidding him to come near, would compel him to take, as it were, the shoes off from his feet. It is this which prompts the angels in heaven to cover their faces as they worship, and to say, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory;” and the same feeling compels the redeemed to cast their crowns before the throne, saying, “Worthy is the Lamb to receive glory and honour, dominion and praise.” The same feeling actuated Peter when he exclaimed, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” In a greater or less degree, it is found to reign in the mind of every true believer. Indeed, there cannot be any real heart religion—any inward sense of the truth—or any appreciation of the gospel system, without an experience of this feeling. It is absolutely essential to all right and proper handling of evangelical Christianity. Without it there is no worship, and, except as a worshipper, no man can come to Christ. We say, *except as a worshipper*, for Jesus, the man who was, in all points, tempted like as we are, yet without sin, and who has a fellow feeling with us in all our troubles, afflictions, and griefs, is yet the great God himself, who, by his power, set fast the universe, that the pillars thereof might not be moved for ever—who sitteth upon the circle of the earth, the inhabitants thereof being as grasshop-

pers in his sight. The proper posture that a creature should take, therefore, when he comes before this exalted Being, is the one that can best express his sense of his own insignificance, when contrasted with the greatness of Him before whom he appears. This would have been befitting though man had never sinned, but how low must be the place which he now should take, since he hath forgotten the God who made him, and from the womb goes astray, speaking lies? Since he hath sold himself to work iniquity, and hath corrupted his whole being, making himself a loathsome and hateful thing; and, still more, since he is a rebel, and an enemy to God in his mind and by wicked works, how prostrate ought he to be when he comes before him whose holiness forbids his even looking upon sin, and whose justice cries aloud for vengeance to be executed on the sinner! Jesus Christ, brethren, is this very Being, the holy One of God, and dare you think one thought of Him which is not one of devoutest reverence? True, he hung on Calvary, and bled and died for sinful men, but yet he lives and reigns for evermore, clad in light as with a garment, and having all power committed to him, thousands of angels fulfilling his commissions, thousands of thousands worshipping before him. And shalt thou, poor inhabitant of earth, dare to stand before him insensible to his glory, and unabashed even in spite of thy littleness and thy vileness? Thou comfortest thyself because of his humiliation work undertaken and accomplished for thee. There is reason that thou shouldest, but remember that this work which had such blessed fruits, instead of lessening, did greatly increase the glory of the Lord Jesus. He is all the more glorious that he is Emmanuel—God with us. The decease which he accomplished at Jerusalem gained for him a crown which otherwise he could not have obtained, that of being Mediator between God and man, the first born and the head of God's spiritual household. A new kind of sovereignty was thus added to what he before possessed; and while in contemplating it our heart is filled with joyful confidence, let us not forget that it still is *sovereignty*—a kingly, godlike property; such a property no doubt as fills the soul with a new and unheard-of ground of hope, but which does this only by first filling it with adoring wonder of a kind that disposes it to cover the face, and with the spirits above to say, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory. The more this is felt, the more the soul is brought into such a frame as this, the more lively and joyous does the hope become. But when this is forgotten, and the believer approaches in a frame of mind different from that of a worshipper, all is cold, barren, and lifeless, and the soul is unfed, unrefreshed. Learn, then, brethren, to make your love to the Saviour an adoring love, and labour to be possessed of a deep sense of the fact that the Being whom

you strive to love is infinitely removed above you in greatness, grandeur, and glory, while yet he is "the Lord your righteousness," your Saviour, your Friend, by whose obedience unto the death and rising again triumphant, you have been begotten again unto a lively hope.

2d, Let your love, then, be a *grateful* love. You know with what peculiar feelings you are disposed to regard that man from whom you have received signal favours, or who has rescued you from some imminent danger, how his memory is cherished, his goodness celebrated, his praises sounded abroad. Nothing is considered too great or too hazardous to be undertaken readily on his account and for his interest, and sooner than forget him all else shall be forgotten. There is no weariness in speaking of his merits, and the story of his kindness never waxes old. If all this be done to an earthly benefactor, and this and a thousand times more is done every day, with what feelings should we regard Him who hath conferred on us such gifts as those we receive from the hand of Emmanuel? Shall we ever weary in speaking of his goodness, or in celebrating his praise, who from being children of wrath and condemnation, hath made us members of the family of Jehovah—"kings and priests unto God and his Father," with whom we shall not only always abide but always reign! Men generally estimate the value of a gift by the amount of trouble and expense at which it may have been procured, but who can reckon up the amount of these to which the Lord Jesus submitted in order to admit his people into life and immortality? Who can tell what a sacrifice he made when he consented to leave the mansions of heaven and become an inhabitant on this earth, exposed to the constant contact of ungodliness and moral defilement, and compelled to endure the taunts and reproaches, the scornful looks and sinful deeds of men, instead of being greeted by the unceasing praises of angels unfallen? Or who can calculate how much of pain and conflict his holy human soul must have endured when he set himself up as the opponent of the powers of darkness? Still more, who can tell his sufferings when his own Father's hand was laid upon him, and when he made his soul an offering for sin? It was much to be shut out of his own dwelling-place, far from his Father's peculiar presence, but how much more to have his Father's face turned from him in righteous displeasure, and to be made to cry out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" When all this is considered, what an estimate should we form of the value of the benefits bestowed upon us by Christ? Again, the extent and the kind of a man's gratitude is often modified by considering what his condition would have been had he not been the object of the peculiar kindness for which he is called upon to be grateful. This is in the experience of all God's children, what often renders their praises

eloquent, and makes their thanksgivings to abound. They think of what they have been delivered from, and contrast the misery and black despair which would have hung over them like a threatening cloud in this life, and when this life had ended, would have fallen upon them like a tempest, swelling, and thickening, and multiplying in intensity of woe onward throughout eternal ages. They contrast this with the peace and quiet of conscience which they now enjoy, and the hope of a heavenly inheritance of which they are ere long to be put in possession; and as they think of this their heart warms with holy feeling, and they break forth in triumphant songs, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, my spirit shall rejoice in God my Saviour." "O magnify the Lord with me, let us exalt his name together." "Praise the Lord all ye nations, laud him all ye people, for his merciful kindness is great toward us, the truth of the Lord endureth for ever. Praise ye the Lord." Oh! brethren, did our thoughts more frequently run in such a strain as this, and were we at all times possessed of a conscious sense of what we owe to redeeming grace, what kind of love would ours become! How our self-righteousness would be burnt up, if our gratitude were of the warm and constantly operative character that should ever belong to it! It is otherwise, because we estimate at too low a rate the benefits which we have obtained from our Saviour-Friend, and because we do not enter deeply enough into his labour, and toil, and pain, in procuring them. We need to meditate on the sufferings of Christ, brethren, in order thus to get our religion brought away from being merely a thing of opinions and beliefs to being a warm elevating heart-possession. That man's religion is not of the right sort if it does not fill his heart with gratitude, and his mouth with praise, while it brings him before Jehovah's throne in humble, adoring, reverential fear. In order to this, my dear friends, we must count the value of the gifts we have obtained by the dying love of Jesus; and this is to be done not merely by considering and acknowledging our utter want and absolute misery without them, but also by reckoning up and duly appreciating the sore travail that had to be undergone before they were procured. And if this be done, where is the Christian whose bosom shall not swell in liveliest gratitude to him who hath gained for us a right to the privileges of God's own children, and who, having loved us from the beginning, will love us to the end?

3dly, The love of the believer towards Christ is an *affectionate* love. When they meet, they meet as friends. "Henceforth," says our Lord, "I call you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth, but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." Nothing so tends to increase

our love towards any one of our brethren, as to make intimate with his affairs, to enter into his plans, and become acquainted with all the causes of his grief and his joy. This brings us into his heart, and we soon feel the warmth that more or less ever plays there. It is in this way that the people of Christ learn to love him with an affectionate love. They are made acquainted with his designs, and learn what interests and occupies him, and so are interested in all that concerns him. They are introduced into his very heart, so to speak. All things whatsoever he hath heard of the Father are made known unto them, and they become intimate with his most secret feelings. This produces a warmth and intensity of affection that breaks out into such an exclamation as that of the two disciples, "did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us by the way!" We fear, brethren, that little of this is experienced in these days. There is little holy ardour, such as this, in the fellowship of Jesus—little real heart-delight and affection toward him and his cause. There is little of the feeling of the apostolic Martyn, whose very physical frame was affected when he heard his Master's name dishonoured or slighted. There is a coldness in the Christianity of most men, that freezes and deadens, and makes one forget, for a time, the origin and spring of the believer's hope, even in the unquenchable love of the man Christ Jesus. We find it difficult to melt men into tears, just because their religion lies so far away from their heart. Men will not break forth into warm emotion, and the reason is, that their heart is but little occupied with their faith. This, we believe, arises from two causes. The first is, that they do not deal with Christ as a *personal Saviour*. Their Saviour is more an abstract, unnameable collection of opinions and beliefs, than a real, living, personal being; and, when they think of the fountain of their salvation, their mind is occupied with these vague and heartless opinions, rather than with him who puts life, animation, and energy into them, and without whom they are meaningless and vain. They have no personal acquaintance with him who lived, died, was buried, rose again, ascended up, and is now exalted, a Saviour and Redeemer, the Captain of Salvation. If you ask them, what think you of Christ? their mind reverts not to a living personal friend, but to a system of sapless truths, or, at most, to some vague and shadowy personality, they know not what, with which they have become acquainted they know not how. Not so the warm-hearted believer, who walks closely with his Lord. There is meaning and heart in his words, when he says, "my beloved is mine, and I am his." But, secondly, the coldness and deadness against which we are now speaking, are to be traced to the fact that men—professedly Christian men—are content with but a meagre acquaintance with the

truth of Christ, and with the will of God, as revealed by him through his word and Spirit. Why should we wonder to find them so cold in their friendship, and having so little sympathy in the feelings and designs of Jesus, since there has, after all, been so little of these revealed to them ! They have not been made acquainted with the private concerns, and the secret interests of Christ. They are content to stand at a distance, and have never yet entered into intimate fellowship with him. They know in the general what are his plans, and what the subject of his thoughts, but they have not entered into his mind, so as to know how deeply he has these things at heart, and how impossible it is for him not to be intensely interested in them. If this be their character, as it is, we fear, the character of far too many professing Christians, there is no cause of astonishment if we find it difficult to rouse them, to warm their heart towards things Divine, and to get them to occupy themselves with the affairs of Christ's Church and people, as things which belong to a beloved friend. Brethren, see to it that you are not Christians of this sort, but that your love to Christ is warm and affectionate, such as attaches him to you as your intimate personal friend, in whose company you delight, and whose interests are inseparably bound up with yours.

4thly, The love of the believer towards Christ is *confiding*. There is no love without this. The love which hesitates, doubts, suspects, and is jealous, is no love at all. Even the affection cherished towards earthly objects is expected to be free from these stains ; but especially is this the case with the love which the real believer bears to Christ. It does not doubt or hesitate. The believer makes no delay, but hastens to close with the offers made, feeling that there is a blessed sufficiency in them for all his wants. He joyfully and at once resigns himself into the arms of the Redeemer, feeling him to be the chiefest among ten thousands, and altogether precious—all his salvation and all his desire. He sees that there is nothing his soul can require which is not most amply supplied by Christ, that in him he has bread to nourish, water to refresh his spirit, and garments in which to be clothed. All needed for life and salvation he sees to be treasured up in the Redeemer—a full and exhaustless fountain of happiness, comfort, and peace. All this is freely presented to him in the Gospel, and he never calls in question the sincerity of the offer. He knows that he is faithful who hath promised, and is fully confident that all which is held out will un-faillingly become his, if he only rely upon the mercy that holds it out to him. And this he cannot but do, for there is no room for doubting, or in the least calling in question the love that makes the offer. He that spared not his own Son, but gave him up unto the death for us all, how

shall he not with him also freely give us all things? It is in this way that he reasons, assuring himself that since Christ hath readily submitted to death for his sake, he could not make a promise of life to him without intending to fulfil it; simply and undoubtingly, therefore, he closes with the offer made, and feels confident that his Lord will keep that which he commits to him against the great day. And just as he suspects not the sincerity of the offer as made to himself, so he envies not, neither is jealous to find that the same offers are made to others. Nor does he grumble or complain when he finds that others attain to peace secure and lasting, in a way it may be more easy than himself, or that their way to life, as it may appear, is smoother and less thorny than his own. His love is so confiding that he is certain of all the treatment he receives being not only good and profitable to him, but the very kind of treatment that love prompts and righteousness requires. Far from grumbling or repining, therefore, he is even joyfully thankful for all that befalls him, however painful to natural feeling. He gives thanks even for his trials and afflictions, knowing that thus the trial of his faith is perfected, and that though no affliction may for the time seem joyous but grievous, nevertheless he is fully assured that it worketh the peaceable fruit of righteousness, if he be but rightly exercised thereby. Indeed how can his lot be otherwise than wise and good? How can it be that he can receive aught which is not for his soul's profit? It is handed over to him by him who was wounded for his guilt, given him by those very hands that were pierced for his iniquities. Impossible then that anything he receives should not speak of tenderness and love. Thus it is that the believer quietly and joyfully resigns himself into the hands of Jesus, ready to do all and to endure all that he may appoint, perfectly assured both that the issues of all shall be good, and that even now all is as love prompts, and as wisdom directs. Oh, my believing friends, cherish such a spirit as this. Be confiding in your love. This will sweeten your trials, soften your toils, and smoothen the roughness of your way onward through this vale of tears and sorrow. 'Tis a loving heart which you may trust that appoints and arranges all these things. 'Tis even Jesus who died for you. Behold, he arranges all, and that too only for the good of his chosen.

In addition to these four distinct features, adoration, gratitude, affection, and confidence, ever found in some degree in the love which the believer bears to Christ, there are two other qualities which ought always to belong to it, but which it seems believers do not always regard, and are not always careful to cultivate. These are

1st, *Constancy*. This property is opposed both to that character of mind which does things by fits and starts, and to that which shuns dif-



faculties and danger, and can accommodate itself to changing times and circumstances. In opposition to both of these, the true Christian loves his Lord with a love that is constant and unwavering. It is a holy flame that ever burns, not now bright and glowing, and again faint and languishing; or in the hour of peace and prosperity warm and animating and kindling all around, while in the hour of adversity it flickers and dies, or at the best is fain to hide itself "under a bushel or under a bed." It is ever the same, in sunshine and in storm, or at least it ought to be so. Alas for it, that we should have to qualify such an assertion thus. But so it is. We ourselves must blush when we say it, but more than this we dare not say, the love of the believer toward Christ *ought* to be constant and unvarying. Its object never changes, why then should it change? But change it does, and that, oh how often! Brethren, be counselled in this matter. Strive to have it true of you that your love to the Saviour is ever warming your heart, and always abounding, and that it is not alone in the quiet when you can exhibit your love without any danger of suffering loss on his account, but even amidst reproaches, rebukes, and blasphemies, when all ill may come upon you for the Lord's sake. Go forth to him without the camp, bearing his reproach, even though this should lead to your being reckoned among the unclean and the despicable. Remember the words, "He that denieth me before men, him will I also deny before my Father and the holy angels," while "He that confesseth me before men, him will I also confess before my Father which is in heaven."

2d, The love of the believer toward Christ should be *ever increasing* in intensity and warmth. This, brethren, is the only guarantee for its being constant and unvarying. In fact, it is the only evidence of its existence at all. Wherever it does exist it has in it a principle of life that will not suffer it finally to be extinguished. Onward it must go. Though at the first like a grain of mustard seed, by and bye it will become as a great tree under whose branches the fowls of the air may lodge. Like leaven hid in meal, it will spread abroad until the whole be leavened. This is its unfailing effect, as the experience of every child of God in every age of the Church can bear witness. It may be hid for a while under a mass of earthliness, but it cannot abide so always. It must come forth, and in due time influence the whole life. Now, brethren, examine and see how far your love to the Saviour possesses this property. All is wrong, remember, if it be not on the increase. Can you find, then, any perceptible difference on it from day to day? Do you find daily increasing pleasure in the service of God, and in the ordinances of his worship? Is there more energy and more sustained effort in your endeavours after the advancement both of your

own salvation and that of others? Is there more importunity in your prayers? more of saying, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me?" Do you find your heart more interested in the progress of Christ's cause, and in the extension of his kingdom? Since you last took your seats in this house, what work have you engaged in, and what have you been occupied with, which may prove that you are thus in progress—that your love to Christ is actually and really on the increase? Can your seasons of devotion bear witness to this? Do your daily avocations, and the spirit in which you go about these, give evidence of it? How different a tale is told by your unruly passions, your earthly pursuits, your love of gain, and your love of pleasure! Oh, brethren, awake to your true standing, live up to your privileges, grow in grace, and in the knowledge and *love* of Christ!

II. We ought now to proceed to consider what is farther said in the text of the believer's state of mind and heart. Besides, and because of his love to his unseen Saviour, "he rejoices," we are told, "with joy unspeakable and full of glory." His joy is unspeakable truly; quite a joy by itself, and unlike every thing else that goes by that name. It is unlike other joys in nothing more than in this, that it is experienced independently of sorrow, yea all the more on account of it. The nature of it, therefore, is such that it cannot be destroyed, abounding as it does even in the midst of what appears to be the very destruction of it. The causes of it also are undying, and ever influential. Its spring is perennial, and always full; and great as it is here, it doth not yet appear what it is destined to become; for "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." This we know, however, that when the Lord shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. It is this especially that fills our heart with joy and gladness—a gladness and joy of such a sort that we cannot set forth their character and properties in words. The peace that reigns in us, and which keeps our heart and mind, passes all understanding; and there is a holy quiet within our souls that nothing can disturb—which the world can neither give nor take away. We despair of making worldly men understand what this is that gladdens us so. They can see no comeliness and no amiable property in him whom we love; and we do not wonder that the spiritual joys which we possess appear to them unintelligible. They scornfully and slightly ask, "What is thy beloved more than another beloved?" and we are not surprised at the question. But if they would but join themselves to our company, we know that their experience would soon be even as ours.

Till they do this they cannot taste of our joy—they cannot believe in its reality. Brethren, come with us, and we *will* do you good, for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.

But this joy of the believer is also said to be *full of glory*. This expression, like the one that follows it, has reference, we suppose, both to the present and future condition of the believer. The word in the original signifies not so much an actually inherent property, as the capability and power of imparting a property; as if it were said that this unspeakable joy brought glory to the believer, and by its dwelling within him made him appear glorious, and actually gave him to possess a glorious character, as well as fitted him for a yet future glorious state—and all this in a high and superlative degree. And this is actually the case with the believer, for he alone, in having this joy, has attained to the true and proper end of his being. There is a glory and an excellence attaching to him which none but himself can possess, he alone being capable of possessing them. He is an heir of God and a joint-heir with Christ. He holds direct intercourse with the throne of heaven, being a king and priest unto God. All this already belongs to him. There is a glory, therefore, attaching to his joy, joying as he does in this very thing that a relationship has been established between him and God; and still more is this the case when it is considered that there remains for him an incorruptible crown of glory, which the Lord the righteous Judge shall, at the day of his appearing, give unto all who love his Son Jesus. If honour and dignity belong to him now, because he has been translated out of darkness into the light of God's truth, and has learned to covet after conformity to God's holy and blessed will, how much more glorious and honourable must he then be accounted when, fully knowing the will of God, he has acquired the power of ever delighting in it, and, dwelling in the presence of God, he shall be occupied unceasingly in doing him homage. His joy here is at the best intermittent and mixed, and yet his character has from it acquired a dignity and a heavenly grandeur that remind us of Adam unfallen. But beyond this land of shades and gloom, in the untroubled light of heaven, where he shall abide unceasingly in the presence of Jehovah, and shall have employment and exercise for all his powers and capacities, and that too upon objects supremely deserving of his thought, his joy shall be unending and uninterrupted, and the glory and honour connected with it, or arising from it, shall then be complete. But all is summed up in that one word of our Lord himself, the fountain of all the believer's joy, and the object of his admiration and love—"Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory." Here is the highest element of the believer's joyousness, the near company and fel-

lowship of the beloved of his soul—likeness and conformity to him in his glorious body. The joy arising from this is indeed a joy that is full of glory. Brethren, have you any longings for such a state? You may be joyous, but does your joy clothe you with glory in this present life, and give you the blessed prospect of a fuller and more unmixed glory in the life to come? Joy is not worth the having unless it dignifies and ennobles, while it gladdens and cheers. All that has not this effect is but the joy and mirth of fools; and nothing can have an effect different from this, but the holy joy of the real believer who rejoices in an absent Lord in whom he believes, and whom he loves with a devout, a grateful, an affectionate, and a confiding love—a love that is constant and unvarying, and ever increasing in intensity and warmth. Amen.

## SERMON CXXI.

BELIEVERS, THE SONS OF GOD—THEIR PRESENT DIGNITY AND FUTURE  
BLESSEDNESS.

BY THE REV. WILLIAM GILSTON, CARNOCK.

“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be : but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him ; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.”—1 JOHN iii. 2, 3.

GREAT and precious are the privileges of the people of God. Great, also, is the blessedness which these privileges imply, and which even now is matter of personal experience in the case of believing men. But greater still will this blessedness be found, when believers shall have been removed from the troubles and the conflicts of a present evil world, and when they shall have reached unto the heavenly kingdom.

An ungodly and unbelieving world, indeed, desires neither to become acquainted with their privileges, nor to participate in the blessedness which flows from the possession of them. But the reason is obvious. They are of a spiritual character ; and, therefore, can be relished and estimated aright by those only who are possessed of a spiritual taste and a spiritual discernment. Had they been of an earthly and carnal nature, the world’s sympathies would have been awakened by them, and the world’s energies engaged in their pursuit. But, because their nature is the opposite of all this, the world accounts lightly of them, and refuses to make them the object of concern.

Of the truth of these statements, both the declarations of Scripture, and the testimony of observation and experience, afford the most satisfactory evidence. Looking no further than the immediately preceding context, we find an exemplification of the fact now adverted to. The apostle, you perceive, there speaks of an important spiritual privilege belonging to believers—even that of adoption—and which he represents as the gift of their heavenly Father’s love. “Behold,” says he, “what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.” But, while he thus speaks admiringly of the Divine condescension and love which are manifested towards sinners of mankind, in calling them out of darkness into light, and in bestowing upon them the privilege of sons, he admits that this

condescension and love, all wondrous and beneficent as they are, awakens no interest in the minds of men in general. And the reason which he assigns for this unconcern is the world's ignorance of, and the world's disaffection to, that Almighty One who bestows such love upon sinners of mankind as to place them in his family, and to give them a right to all the privileges of his children. For he says, "Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not." The carnal mind being enmity against God, and, therefore, not liking to retain God in its knowledge, it cherishes enmity against the children of God, and neither feels any true sympathy with their pursuits and enjoyments, nor truly desires to make trial of their promised blessedness. For "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." "If the world hate you," said Jesus to his disciples, "ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you: if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they knew not him that sent me."

While, however, the apostle thus seeks to lead believers to understand fully the position which they occupy in reference to the world, and to beware of thinking it strange that the world should account lightly of them, or of being stumbled thereby, he is desirous, at the same time, to keep their minds fixed upon the distinguished privilege which belongs to them as the members of God's family, as the heirs of the heavenly inheritance; and to constrain them to make it their desire and endeavour that their privilege as the children of God, and as the heirs of the grace of life, may conduce to their progress in holiness, and to their preparedness for heaven and for glory. Hence, he gives utterance to the statement of our text, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." And as he propounds this statement to believers, for their upholding in the midst of the world's opposition and the world's despite, and for their encouragement in the ways of holiness, so it is eminently fitted, through the Divine blessing, for securing these all-important ends. For, *first*, the honour and dignity of the Christian's present condition are here asserted—"Beloved, now

are we the sons of God ;” *secondly*, the future happiness and glory of believing men are here described—“ It doth not yet appear what we shall be : but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him ; for we shall see him as he is ;” and, *thirdly*, the gracious fruit or effect of the hope which stands connected with the future blessedness and glory is here adverted to—“ And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.”

*First*, The honour and dignity of the Christian’s present condition are asserted in the text—“ Beloved, now are we the sons of God.” It is of believers that the apostle here speaks ; and the privilege which he here mentions as belonging to them, and as constituting their true honour and dignity, is that of sonship. And for this privilege they are indebted to the distinguishing love and grace of their merciful Father in heaven—“ As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them who believe on his name : which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” Nor is it a small honour which has thus been conferred upon them, nor a mean dignity to which they are thus raised, who have received power to become the sons of God. The relation in which they are thus placed is one that brings them into a state of exceeding nearness to God ; which is eminently fitted to draw out their affections after him, and to inspire their hearts with confidence in him ; and which encourages them to cherish the hope and persuasion that He unto whom they are privileged to cry, “ Abba, Father,” will assuredly administer to their necessities, and will perfect all that concerns them. Once, indeed, their condition and their character were very different ; for once they were the children of wrath and the heirs of hell, even as others. Sometime they were alienated, and enemies in their mind, by wicked works. Formerly, they were far from God, and strangers to the love and the knowledge of his ways ; but now they have been brought near ; now, they have been reconciled in the body of Christ’s flesh, through death ; now, they have, through the all-efficacious operation of the Spirit of God, been regenerated, and been made partakers of a Divine nature, in the gracious qualities thereof. A new and spiritual principle has been implanted within them, and they now desire to serve God heartily and continuedly ; and, being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever, they have been made members of the household of faith, and been constituted heirs according to the promise.

How invaluable, then, is the privilege which belongs unto be-

believing men, as adopted into God's family! and how blessed is the condition in which, as sons of God, they are placed! Surely, the greatest of earthly honours, and the most excellent worldly condition, are not worthy to be compared therewith. They who are made members of the household of faith, feel that, as the children of the Highest, they can go to him with a holy boldness and filial confidence, as children unto a father, and can pour out their complaints before him, and make him acquainted with all their wants. Realizing the privilege of sonship as theirs, and recognizing in it the wondrous condescension and love of God towards them, as having brought them—rebels and outcasts though they were—guilty and depraved also—to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Christ, and as having put them into his family, and promised to provide for them, they enjoy a holy quiet, and serenity of soul amidst the varying circumstances of their lot upon the earth, and rest persuaded that their heavenly Father, who doeth all things wisely and well, shall make all things work together for their good, and shall bring them at last into his heavenly kingdom and glory.

For this relationship is one of present experience. The Apostle says, "*Now* are we the sons of God." It is the happiness of the believer's present condition that he is a child of God. The new birth takes place on this earth. Man's conversion must be accomplished now while he is in the body, if it is to be accomplished at all. And while no man can enter into the kingdom of God except he be born again, the change which the new birth implies, no power can reverse. But adoption comes along with the change, and it, too, is unalterable. "I will betroth thee unto me for ever," is a declaration of Old Testament Scripture, which demonstrates, according to the tenor of New Testament statements, that the gifts and calling of God are without repentance, and that his purposes of love and grace are unchangeable. Believers are now the children of God. They are no longer outcasts and aliens—they are no more miserable and guilty. God has called them back from their wanderings—he has introduced them into his family. The world, it is true, may disesteem them, or it may be ignorant of them. Their graces may yet be weak—infirmities may still encompass them, and through the power of indwelling sin, and the force of temptation, they may still be liable to be overtaken with a fault and to fall into sin. Still the privilege and glory are theirs of having God for their Father, and of being his children. Still it belongs to them, as his adopted ones, to have a saving knowledge of his ways, to have free access unto him, and to be assured of his protection. As the members of his family, they are the special objects of his love, and of his watchful care, and of his restraining grace. As such, they are privileged to take unto them a strong consolation under all circum-



stances and at all times. And, regarding God as their Father, they are encouraged, even in their afflictions, to lift up their eyes to him, not as a severe master, but as a gracious Father; and it is their privilege to know that these afflictions are only chastisements and trials from his parental love, which he employs for their spiritual profiting, and in order that they may be partakers of his holiness, and be rendered meet for heaven.

Is this privilege, then, brethren, yours? And do you know anything experimentally of the blessedness of possessing such a privilege? The question is infinitely important, and, therefore, it demands your instant and your serious consideration. For if you have not yet been adopted into the family of God, you are still the children of wrath and the heirs of hell. There is no neutral position which you can occupy in this matter—there is no middle ground on which you can stand, and where you can hope to find rest for the sole of your feet. There are but two great families of human beings upon this earth:—the one is the family of the wicked one, and consists of all unbelieving and unconverted persons; the other is the family of God, and consists of those who have been regenerated by his grace, and who have received the spirit of adoption, whereby they cry “Abba, Father.” And to the one or the other of these families you must belong. If you are still in your natural state, then you are a member of the first, and must be a child of misery and guilt, and exposed to the infliction of wrath. They only who are born of the Spirit are members of the family of God, and are heirs of the heavenly kingdom. And, therefore, we would urge you to be in earnest in regard to this thing, and to understand what your real state and character are in the sight of God, and to beware of deceiving yourselves in reference to what is so closely connected with your happiness and your holiness. It is not enough, remember, that you have a name that you live. The privilege of sonship is a real, vital, purifying privilege, and while it implies the bestowment of all covenant blessings upon his children on the part of God, and his engagement to perfect all that concerns them, it implies the exercise, on their part, of filial trust and confidence, of a holy fear of offending God, of unfeigned submission to his blessed will, of a true devotedness to his service. If you are strangers, therefore, to such exercises of the children of God, how can you allege that you have received the privilege of sonship? Be concerned, then, to understand how the case is with you. “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith, prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?”

*Secondly,* The future happiness and glory of the saints are here

declared. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." The present privilege of believers is a high and honourable privilege. It is the free and undeserved gift of their gracious God and Father. It is most precious and enduring. They are now the sons of God. But their blessedness is not confined to time. The present state is only, as it were, the childhood of their being—the commencement of their spiritual existence and enjoyment—the beginning of a life which shall never end. There is a world beyond this where they shall dwell for ever, and where they shall be eternally blessed.

Of the future blessedness of the saints, the Apostle speaks in the text, first of all, in a negative way. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." The future glory is to the believer while on the earth a hidden glory. It is the object of his faith and hope—not of actual vision and possession. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." What the saints of God shall be in their heavenly state, doth not now appear unto them. For wise and gracious ends, in respect both of his own glory and of his people's good, God hath thrown a veil over the future blessedness and glory, or hath only afforded glimpses thereof, in order to enliven the hopes and to quicken the diligence of believers. "For we walk by faith," says an Apostle, "and not by sight." And again he says, "We are saved by hope, for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it."

But this is not all; for the Apostle, adverting further to the future blessedness and glory of the sons of God, expressly says, "We know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." And thus he declares affirmatively, what the future blessedness and glory will be. The believer while on the earth mourns an absent Lord. He grieves that now, through the power of remaining corruption and of indwelling sin, he is so frequently drawn aside from the right path and led to do what is evil. And he longs for the time when he shall be called out of the world, and when he shall attain to the perfecting of his being, and the consummating of his happiness in the heavens above. His desires after entire freedom from sin, and after perfect holiness, make him groan under the burden and the weight of sin, and look forward with earnest expectation for the time when he shall fly away and be at rest. Though the glory with which his hopes stand connected is future, yet its reality is with him a matter of firm persuasion. Being a child of God, he is an heir of God, and a joint heir with Christ. The Spirit himself witnesseth with his spirit as to his filial re-

lationship to God. The promise of God regarding the future blessedness is a sure promise, and, therefore, he cherishes the well-grounded and assured hope of that glory which is to be revealed, and of that happiness which awaits the righteous in the heavenly kingdom.

When the Apostle, however, declares his persuasion of the certainty of the future glory, he had the direct testimony of God regarding this matter in the way of Divine revelation. This knowledge came to him through Divine inspiration. And when he makes the assertion in the words before us, he speaks by the immediate direction and authority of the Holy Ghost. But he had a persuasion in reference to this matter, which was reached by him in the same way as other believers attain unto it. He believed the testimony of God regarding it. And he felt persuaded that what God had testified in reference to this thing, would certainly be accomplished. Hence he says, "We know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him." And when he thus speaks, the Apostle adverts to the fact of Christ's appearing—for it is evidently to Christ that he refers—as a clearly certified and certain thing. And the circumstance upon which he desires more especially to fix the notice of believers, and by which he seeks to afford them a more striking manifestation of their own future blessedness is, that they shall be like Christ—not like him as he was on the earth, subjected to manifold privations, assaulted by numerous strong temptations, reproached, and vilified, and persecuted by an ungodly world, and suffering shame and death at the hands of wicked men—but like him as he is in glory, surrounded with the hosts of heaven, and as he will be when he shall "appear the second time without sin unto salvation."

Such is the blessedness and glory of the future condition of believers. They shall be like to Christ. Their resemblance to Jesus, indeed, is begun now. In some it is more, and in others it is less advanced. In all it is imperfect while they are on the earth. But in heaven it is complete. The saints of God, when they reach the heavenly kingdom, attain to the full manhood and strength of their being. They are then like to Christ himself. The Divine image, which was lost through man's apostacy from God, but which was renewed and restored in part in the believer's regeneration and growing sanctification, is then fully perfected. They are then indeed partakers of Christ's Divine nature in all its moral manifestations, having escaped from all the corruption and the sin which now adhere to them, and by which their advancement Zionward, is now oftentimes so much hindered. They who are now the sons of God, shall be like Christ at his appearance, both in holiness and in happiness. They shall be like him in the purity of his nature, and in the immortality of his being. They shall resemble him in

a perfect freedom from sin. They shall be like him in the fervency of his love, and in the perfection of all his other graces. They shall be like him in the glory of which he is now possessed, and in which he shall hereafter appear.

The reason of all this is here also assigned :—" For," says the Apostle, " we shall see him as he is." The Apostle Paul, adverting to the beatific vision which shall burst on the believer's view when he shall reach the heavenly Jerusalem, and to the enlarged powers with which believers shall be then endowed, says, " For now we see through a glass darkly ; but then face to face ; now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known." And in another part of his writings, the same Apostle, speaking of the transforming power of the truth concerning Christ upon the sentiments and conduct of men, thus expresses himself :—" But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." Now, if it be indeed true, as the word of God declares, and as the experience of believers demonstrates, that the manifestation of the glory of Christ, which is made in the glass of the gospel, and which is apprehended by faith, does exercise a transforming power upon men's sentiments and conduct, and proves, through the power of the Holy Spirit, efficacious in moulding them after the Divine image, we need not wonder that still more decidedly transforming results should be represented as connected with the actual vision of Christ in glory ; that the seeing of Christ as he is, the beholding of him face to face, the knowing of God really and truly in his actings, and his attributes, even as we are known, should indeed prove the very perfecting of the believer's nature, and the very consummation of his happiness. Not indeed, as if any, even the smallest remains of corruption and sin could enter heaven, and require to be subdued there ; nor as if the believer were not wholly sanctified at death. But because the clear and immediate vision which is implied in seeing Christ as he is, or face to face, constitutes the height of man's enjoyment in the heavenly kingdom, and serves to expand and elevate his whole powers and affections of soul, and to make him like the Divine object of his devout, and immediate, and continued contemplation. Christ, as seen through ordinances, and by the eye of faith, is most glorious. How transcendently glorious, then, must he appear when seen as he is in immediate and beatific vision. And oh, to what enlightenment of spiritual apprehension, to what enlargement of mental capacity, to what extent of spiritual enjoyment, must all have reached, that are privileged to see Jesus as he is, to behold him face to face, to know Him even as they are known ! No more will they have to complain of infirmity and sin. No more will they have

to lament over the deadness of their hearts, the dulness of their spiritual apprehensions, the coldness of their love, the imperfection of their services. No more will they have to struggle with the spiritual adversary, and to contend against the manifold temptations either of the evil heart of unbelief within, or of the world lying in wickedness without. For seeing Christ, in clear and immediate vision, as he is, and in all the glory and the grace of his person and work, and being transformed into his image, and truly fashioned after his glorious likeness, they shall indeed love him supremely, they shall rejoice in him, and praise him continually, they shall glory in him unabatedly and for evermore. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."

This happiness and glory, it is true, are not matters of actual enjoyment by the saints while on the earth, except in the earnest and foretaste thereof, which even now they are often privileged to have. For they are now under a veil. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." But though now only things hoped for, they shall assuredly be attained. And it is a circumstance which should be remembered with special gratitude, that the future blessedness of the sons of God is here represented in close connection with Christ. The love of the Father, indeed, is the Divine source whence spring all the gifts of grace and salvation. But these gifts come to us through Christ; and they are ever spoken of in connection with the work of his mediation, and as the fruit of his sore travail of soul. Through Christ we have pardon, and acceptance, and eternal life. His is the righteousness for the sake of which we are justified in the sight of God. Our sanctification is begun, and carried on, and perfected through the gracious operation of that Holy Spirit, the gift of whom is the fruit of his purchase. And when he shall appear—even Christ who is the life of his people—then shall they also appear with him in glory, and shall be like him, because they shall see him as he is. And therefore, when you consider that all the blessings and privileges which as believers you now experience on the earth, or hope to participate in when you come to heaven, stand connected with Christ, and with his work of doing and suffering as the Mediator, this consideration assuredly should awaken within you the feeling of the warmest gratitude, should deepen your sense of the condescension and grace of Christ towards you, and should constrain you to cherish more earnest longings of soul after conformity to his image, and after the sight of him in glory.

Nor should you ever forget that, unless you are adopted into the family of God now, you shall not be admitted to dwell with them in the heavenly kingdom; unless you are made conformable to the image of Christ on the earth, you cannot become partakers of glory in the upper sanctuary. To

all that are Christ's, indeed, is given the assurance, that when he shall appear they shall be partakers of his glory. But, the seeing of him as he is, the full and immediate vision of Christ, in all the matchless excellencies of his person, and in all the glorious manifestations of his character as the Divine Mediator, as these are unfolded to the admiring contemplation of his people in the heavenly Jerusalem—is a privilege that is connected with likeness to Christ. And this likeness will never be reached in its perfection as realized by the saints in glory, if believers are not made conformable unto it in this their state of discipline for heaven. Though it doth not yet appear what they shall be, still it is the privilege of the sons of God to cherish the persuasion, that when he shall appear, they shall be like him, for they shall see him as he is. And then enjoying the immediate vision of that Sun of Righteousness, whereby the heavenly light and glory are diffused around and over them, they shall, by this vision abiding with them, be continued in the perfection of that likeness to which they have attained. Still the fact is certain, that if this likeness to Christ is not begun on earth, it will never be perfected in heaven. If he who commanded the light to shine out of darkness has not shined now in your hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, that glorious light which the Sun of Righteousness will produce in the saints of God, when they behold the Saviour, not on earth, but in heaven—not amidst the obscurities and the apprehensions of present manifestations, but amidst the express testimonies of his favour and blessing—shall never become a matter of personal experience with you. If you are children, then are you heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ, of the glory to which he has been raised. But if you are not children, then you are not heirs of God, nor joint-heirs with Christ, of the glory that is to be revealed. And therefore, it infinitely concerns you to beware of all deception regarding this, and to understand how the case really is with you. Delusion here will not only leave you subjected to all the misery and the guilt of your natural state, but lead sooner or later to your everlasting ruin. Give yourselves then, in right earnest, to the consideration of this all-important concern. And knowing that likeness to Christ in gracious affections, and holiness, is indispensably requisite to the seeing of him as he is in glory, be solicitous to put on Christ now, to be conformed now to his holy will, to be moulded after his Divine image, and to have him formed in your hearts, the hope of glory.

*Thirdly,* The last thing which is adverted to in the text, is the fruit or gracious result of the hope of the future blessedness and glory. And this result is holiness. "Every man that hath this hope in him

purifieth himself, even as he is pure." Likeness to the Divine image is what the Apostle, as we have seen, declares to be an essential element in the future happiness of the sons of God,<sup>2</sup> and indispensable to their entrance on the possession of the future glory. And the statement which he next makes is, that every one who cherishes the hope of this glory and happiness, will be found to purify himself, even as He, upon whom his hope is fixed, is pure. And when he makes this statement, he only asserts what is most consistent with other declarations of the word of God—what is most agreeable to the nature of the Christian hope—what is most suitable to the renewed tastes, and desires, and endeavours of the regenerated soul—and what has been expressly and amply provided for in the arrangements of the covenant of grace. The Apostle Paul, adverted to the influence of the grace of hope upon the sentiments and conduct of believers, says, that "we are saved by hope;" and obviating the objections brought against the doctrines of grace, that they tend to licentiousness, the same Apostle thus argues:—"Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" And the Apostle Peter blesses the "God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for them who are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time." And assuredly, if under the ordinary circumstances of life, and in reference to temporal things, the expectation of some worldly good yet future, and which has only the promise of fallible man to rest upon, does oftentimes stimulate men to acts of greatest daring, and sustain their spirits amidst manifold delays and disappointments, and enable them to await the issue patiently, it cannot be but that the Christian's hope, having God for its author and its object, having respect to the future blessedness and glory, being founded upon the promise and the oath of God himself, standing connected with the work and mediation of Christ, and being strengthened and sustained through the gracious operation of the Holy Ghost, should be truly a soul-comforting and a soul-purifying hope—should prove a strong consolation amidst present troubles and sorrows—should greatly fortify the believer under the assaults of temptation, and should powerfully constrain him to seek after a growing conformity to the Divine will, and a more perfect resemblance to the Divine likeness. Constituted as man is, it would be contrary to the believer's renewed nature—it would be a kind of violence to his spiritual character, as one under the influence of Divine grace, and as having the principle of the spiri-

tual life implanted within him, and as being privileged to regard himself as a child of God and an heir of heaven—to suppose that the hope here spoken of would not naturally tend to exercise a purifying influence upon his sentiments and conduct. Indeed, so truly is this the case, that when this hope, which is an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil, fails to exercise a really purifying influence, and to mould the desires, and tastes, and habits into true sympathy with, and a real conformity unto, the character and likeness of Him whom the believer hopes to see in glory, it must be either something different from the Christian grace of hope, or sin must have been allowed for a season to obscure his apprehensions of Divine things, and to deaden his aspirations after them.

But the Apostle, you perceive, does not rest satisfied with this view of the matter merely, conclusive as his inference is. For he expressly asserts that every man that experiences this hope, as founded upon the Divine promise, purifies himself, even as Christ is pure. And thus he intimates that the Christian's hope is truly a practical thing—that it constrains the believer now to strive after a likeness to Christ—that it sets him to work out his salvation with fear and trembling. He asserts, that the man who really cherishes the hope of the future glory *is* careful to shake himself free from all that would prevent his attaining it; and he reminds us that every one who, in the exercise of this grace, realizes the future blessedness as his, studies to walk suitably to so high a hope, and makes it truly his desire and endeavour to purify himself, even as Christ is pure. And how can it be otherwise? The entrance of sin into heaven would destroy its blessedness, and would poison the whole spiritual enjoyments which are to be found there. Moral impurity, of any kind or degree, attaching to the soul, would unfit it altogether for the Divine presence. The man, therefore, who truly cherishes the well-grounded hope of admission into heaven, and of standing among the blessed around the throne, and truly desires that this hope may be realized, will not fail to purify himself from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. Keeping heaven, and its blessedness, and its glory, continually in view, and desiring to see Christ as he is, the gracious soul is, through the hope of all this, more and more crucified unto sin, and more and more weaned from the world, and more and more conformed to Christ. Hence it follows that, when men are not found to purify themselves from sin, and to keep themselves separate from all ungodliness, their hope must either be unscriptural and vain, or be hindered from exercising its legitimate influence upon their minds. If the hope which leads a man to cherish the expectation of being admitted



into heaven, and of seeing Christ there as he is, does not make him in love with the holiness of heaven, and with the purity of Christ, and does not really and truly form him unto this purity and holiness now, and when professing to belong to Christ, it must be a hope altogether of a delusive character, and which will sooner or later come to nought, and leave its possessor utterly comfortless and utterly ashamed.

High, then, assuredly, is the standard of excellence to which the disciples of Jesus are called, as such, to endeavour to attain. And holy is the character of the walk and conversation which it is expected that they, as laying claim to the hopes of believers, will follow. "Every man," says the Apostle, "that hath this hope in him,"—even the hope of seeing Christ in glory, and being like him—"purifieth himself, even as he is pure." And this statement undoubtedly is sufficiently clear, and explicit, and descriptive, in regard to what ought to be the desire and endeavour of the professed followers of Christ. Nay, it is such a statement as may enable them at once, and without hesitation, if they deal honestly by their own souls, to determine the character of their religious profession, and to ascertain whether the hope to which they lay claim be producing the expected fruit. It shows them, on the one hand, to what their religious privileges and their professed hopes oblige them, and what they are designed to secure; and, on the other hand, that when this obligation is not truly recognised, and when this end is not really being secured, there can be no well-grounded and scriptural hope of seeing Christ in glory, and of being made like unto him. This hope is truly a purifying hope, or, in other words, when it really exists in the soul, and is allowed to exercise its due influence upon the sentiments and the conduct, it divorces its possessor from sin, and shuts him up to the pursuits of holiness. And this gracious result or fruit will be manifested in the case of such an one, not merely in reference to the evil habits, and the grosser outward violations of the Divine law, which every one readily admits to be altogether inconsistent with the Christian character and with the hopes of the gospel, but in reference to indulgences which are less obvious to the outward eye, and to the sinful character of which many professors are little alive—in reference to sins which are more secret, but not less offensive—in regard to the evil principles and the unhallowed affections which lurk within—the unsanctified tempers, the unholy passions, the worldly-mindedness, the covetousness, the evil speaking, the self-seeking, the ungodliness, which so extensively obtain. For, as all these things are contrary unto the Spirit of Christ, and directly opposed to all well-grounded hope of seeing Christ in glory, and as they are inconsistent with the purity and blamelessness after which the sons of God are called to aspire, so the hope that leaves a man in

possession of these things, or that does not constrain him to desire and to endeavour after the mortification and destruction of all such affections, and of all such manifestations of the spirit of ungodliness, must be an unscriptural hope. Not, indeed, as if absolute freedom from these affections and tendencies were attainable on earth, or that purity, in its perfectness, were to be reached before death. For sanctification is a gradual work; and the life of holiness attains to maturity only by degrees. But, as likeness to Christ is the high and holy standard unto which the believer ought to aspire, so it becomes him, like the Apostle Paul, not to count himself to have apprehended, but doing this one thing, even forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, to press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. There must be no halting in this onward and upward course. How great soever may be any one's attainments in the Divine life, and how much soever he may resemble Him whom he hopes and longs to see in glory, there will still be something to be attained in this life, and there will still be some features of the Divine likeness awaiting while he is on the earth. At no point, therefore, can he with safety and with innocence stop short in this matter. The hope which he cherishes, if indeed it be a genuine principle, will not fail to make him solicitous to put off all ungodliness and sin, and to grow in likeness to Christ. And the more assimilated that he becomes to the divine pattern of excellence which is proposed for his imitation, and the nearer that he reaches the heavenly mansions, the more assuredly will his affections be drawn from off the things of earth, and fixed on things above—the more carefully will he keep himself in the love of God, and the more earnestly will he long for the time when the earthly house of this tabernacle being dissolved, he shall no more see through a glass darkly, but face to face, and enjoying the immediate vision of Christ in glory, he shall be truly and wholly like him.

You see, then, brethren, believers in Jesus, your calling of God. Blessed is the privilege which, as the sons of God, you enjoy. Precious are the hopes which, as such, you are permitted to cherish. Lose not sight, then, of the character unto which this privilege and these hopes are designed to form you. "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." Be concerned to allow this principle to exercise its full influence upon your sentiments and conduct. Believe not your claim to this hope, by walking inconsistently therewith. The expectants of heaven should have their conversation in heaven even now. The man that would see God's face in glory should be careful to live now as realizing Him who is invisible. Be solicitous, therefore, that through the sanctifying

power of this hope, your affections may be raised above this earth, and your whole principles and habits may become assimilated to those of the inhabitants of heaven. Be in earnest about Divine things. Deal with them as things in which you have a real and personal interest. Let it appear that you are indeed living, not for time, but for eternity, by living now under the power of the world to come. And as you lay claim to the privilege of being the "sons of God," and profess to cherish the hope of seeing Christ in glory, and of being like him, oh study to walk as the children of God, and as the subjects of the kingdom that is above should walk now—exemplifying now the dispositions of children, and evidencing now, by your growing spirituality and holiness, that the hope of seeing Christ in glory, and of being made perfectly like him, is with you in very deed a practical principle, and really constrains you to purify yourselves, as Christ is pure. AMEN.

## SERMON CXXII.

WALKING WITH GOD.

REV. WILLIAM ANDSON, KIRKMAHOE.

“ And Enoch walked with God : and he was not ; for God took him.”—GEN. v. 24.

THE notice which the inspired narrative contains of this distinguished patriarch of Old Testament times is very brief ; but, at the same time, very significant and expressive. We learn from the Epistle of Jude, that he was a prophet, and predicted the coming of the Lord to judgment ; but he was something better than even a prophet—a singularly devout, holy, and godly man. Man may often value gifts or even worldly advantages more than grace, and confer more honour on those who possess the former, than on those who possess the latter. But, not so that God who looketh upon the heart, and who judges men by a moral and spiritual standard. Enoch was distinguished by him above the common race of men ; privileged in a way to which none that lived before him had been exalted, and in which only one that has come after him has shared—by being translated that he should not see death—transported at once, body and soul, without passing through that dread change of dissolution which is the common lot of men—from earth to heaven—from the world of the ungodly to the society of an innumerable company of angels, and immediate fellowship with God himself. And to what is it to be ascribed that he was selected to enjoy this singular exemption from the common lot of the children of Adam ? that he was spared from encountering and falling under the power of that death, of which it is said, “ that it passeth upon all men, for that all have sinned ? ” The Apostle tells us in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, that “ by faith Enoch was translated, that he should not see death ; for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.” And the connection between the first and second clauses of the text is evident, that it was because Enoch walked with God, or maintained a course of most intimate and holy fellowship with Him, that God took him to himself. The life of this eminent saint and patriarch is described in a very few words ; but how much do they imply ! They give us an insight into his real character, which many pages, filled up with details of the doings of the outer life, might have failed to communicate, and which frequently fail to convey, volumes of biography—in regard to those whose history they record. They paint the inner and spiritual life of the man, and, simply telling us that “ he walked

with God," they set before us, in vivid colours, what was the course of his thoughts and affections—what his communings with an unseen Jehovah—what the habitual tenor of his life and conversation in a strict and holy walk, as under His immediate eye. And it is worthy of being observed, that the course which procured for Enoch such a distinction in the sight of God, and such a singular token of his approbation, is one from which none are excluded. All are invited to pursue it; and surely this walking in fellowship with God is a privilege of the most honourable and blessed kind, not less than a duty of imperative obligation. The humblest saint may be distinguished here—even the vilest sinner is called to it through the gracious invitations of the gospel. And though none may be privileged, as Enoch was, to enter heaven without passing through the dark valley of the shadow of death, yet the promise of Christ to all his people is, that, believing in him, they shall never perish, but have everlasting life.

We shall consider, *First*, What it is to walk with God;  
And, *Secondly*, The duty and privilege of so doing.

*First*, What is meant by walking with God? The language is obviously figurative, but so simple and intelligible is the image, as hardly to stand in need of explanation. When we read of one walking with another, it immediately suggests the idea of their going in company, proceeding in the same direction, having probably the same end in view, and of their being on terms of friendship or agreement, and holding converse by the way. Laying aside the figure, it denotes friendly intercourse and communion between the parties who are said so to walk with one another—a certain degree at least of similarity in their views and aims, habitual converse and fellowship maintained in various ways. Such friendly and habitual intercourse is often kept up between man and man, as might be described by language of this kind; and in this case we have no difficulty in understanding the nature of it, or in appreciating the pleasure and profit of which it may be the source. But when it is spoken of as taking place between God—the invisible, and infinitely exalted Jehovah—and poor, weak, sinful, and guilty man, there is more difficulty in conceiving of it aright. We may be ready to exclaim, will God in very deed dwell and walk with men upon this earth? Can there be any real and intimate fellowship between the unseen and holy God, and frail and sinful mortals? The Bible declares not only that such a thing is possible, but that it is a privilege to which men are freely invited, and which all the holy men of old, of whom it speaks, like Enoch, enjoyed—a privilege, in short, which is common to every true believer. The experience of all the saints can testify to its reality, its blessedness, its pre-eminent advantages. They

may feel that they fall very far short of improving and living up to it as they ought, but they know in some degree from experience what it is, and can testify that it has indeed been good for them to draw near unto God, and that their most profitable and blessed hours have been spent in communion with him.

But to begin at the beginning of this matter, walking with God implies, *first of all*, that we be reconciled to him. Originally there was no need for this. Before the fall, there was no rupture of friendship to make reconciliation necessary. But how different is it now! By sin we have revolted from God. The fall has occasioned a breach between him and man, which has separated us from him by the widest possible distance, so that by nature we are far off, aliens and enemies to him that made us. On the one hand, the wrath of God has been kindled against us, on account of our transgressions; on the other hand, the carnal mind is enmity against God, and is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. We say then, that, as the case now stands between God and man, we cannot walk with God until we be reconciled to him. "For how can two walk together, except they be agreed?" What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? or what communion hath light with darkness? or what concord hath Christ with Belial?" And here the great question arises, in what way this reconciliation is to be effected. Is it possible that guilty and miserable man may be restored to the favour and friendship of his God, and brought to walk with him, as if no breach had taken place—that the dark clouds of wrath which had gathered over the sinner's head, charged with the lightnings of Divine vengeance, and threatening to overwhelm him with utter destruction, may be rolled away, and the light of God's reconciled countenance, putting gladness into the heart, be made to shine upon him; and that love and gratitude, and child-like confidence, and willing obedience, may take the place of that determined enmity and rebelliousness which naturally reign in his bosom? Oh yes, it is possible. There is a way provided by God himself, in amazing mercy, for the children of men, by which all this may be brought about, consistently with the honour of his own justice and holiness, and the maintenance of his own righteous authority. That way is revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the peculiar characteristic of the gospel, its chief and most blessed feature, that it reveals such a way; and the grand design of its being proclaimed is, that this very reconciliation may be effected between God and sinners. We who sometimes were afar off, may now be made nigh by the blood of Christ; for he hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might *bring us to God*. By his cross the enmity is done away, and a free path of return is opened up to the guiltiest of the sons of men. "You," says

the Apostle to the Colossians, who had been brought to the enjoyment of that peace which the Lord Jesus hath made by the blood of his cross; "you who sometimes were alienated, and enemies in your minds, by wicked works; yet now hath he reconciled, in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable, and irreprovable in his sight." "Now, then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you, in Christ's stead, be reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." At the same time, it is not to be forgotten, that as there is a twofold enmity, so it is necessary there should be a twofold reconciliation. God is reconciled to us when his anger is turned away from us—when all our sins are freely forgiven, and we are accepted and justified through faith in the Redeemer's blood. But, if man continued to retain his enmity, there could be no fellowship. That would be no reconciliation which was all upon one side. The enmity of the carnal mind must be subdued—the natural aversion of man to God and holiness must be removed, and such a change of heart effected, as shall lead him to take delight in both. It is not enough, in short, that God be reconciled to man, but man must also be reconciled to God—to his nature, his laws, his government, his gospel, his ways. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, whose office it is to make sinners willing in the day of Divine power, and to shed abroad the love of God in the heart, so that it is drawn towards him with bands of love, and with cords of a man. And this double reconciliation is effected whenever the sinner is enabled, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, to give a cordial acceptance to the offers of the gospel. Then he enters into the covenant of God's peace, and thenceforth his fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And not till then can there be any real termination to the alienation which sin has caused, or the slightest measure of true concord and agreement—not till then can any sinner truly walk with God.

Such, then, is the commencement of that course spoken of in the text, in which Enoch walked. In considering *farther* wherein it consists, we may remark that it includes these three things—nearness to God, or a felt sense of his presence, which may be described as a walking before God—communion with him—and a walking in the same direction, or with the same designs, and towards the same ends.

1. If we walk with God, we must needs walk before Him—that is, with the conscious remembrance that He is near, and observant of all our ways, and even of the most secret thoughts of our heart—with habitual recollection of the truth that his all-seeing eye is upon us, and that we can do nothing but in his presence. There is a sense, indeed, in

which he is not far from every one of us. In virtue of his omnipresence, He is equally near to all—the witness of the actions of all—the unerring observer of all that is said and done, and of all the thoughts of every heart. “He compasseth our path and our lying down, and is acquainted with all our ways.” In this sense, all walk before him—all live under the inspection of his all-seeing eye. But multitudes are totally forgetful or regardless of the presence of God; and what we mean by walking before him, the sense in which the expression is used, in the passage, where God commanded Abraham—“Walk before me, and be ye perfect”—is to live under a habitual, realizing sense of this great truth, bringing ourselves, by faith and reflection, consciously under the eye of God, and feeling, wherever we are, the impression of Hagar, “Thou, God, seest me.” What a restraint on sin would this prove, if realized as it ought to be! Should we dare to do that in the felt presence of God, which we should not dare to do in the presence of our fellow-men, or if we knew that one whom we respected for integrity and uprightness were looking on—should we be bold enough, under the very eye of God, penetrating into the inmost recesses of our hearts, to give unrestrained indulgence to imaginations and desires, which would cover men with shame, were they known to others as they are to God and to themselves—what solemnity and watchful circumspection would then pervade the tenor of our thoughts and conversation, and that not only in our intercourse with men, but in secret, and when freed from all outward restraint! Nor is this habitual regard to the omniscient eye of an everywhere-present Jehovah inconsistent, in the case of the believer, with cheerfulness and joy. It tends rather to promote both; for it is that God whose name is love, whose presence is felt to be near; and it is in the endearing character of a father and a friend not less than of a preserver and judge, that his nearness is realized. And just in proportion as this walking before him is influential in promoting holiness of heart and life, in the same degree will it be effectual to promoting peace and joy.

2. The second thing included in walking with God is fellowship or communion. Having once been delivered from his natural state of enmity and estrangement, and brought near to God through the mediation of Christ, it is the duty and privilege of the believer to live near to him, maintaining and improving that holy fellowship to which he has been admitted. And it is worthy of being observed, that, as it begins with reconciliation to God through the blood of the cross, so it must be kept up in the same way. The mediation of Christ is as necessary to its continuance as it was to its commencement. It is by the faith of him that we have access, with confidence, by one Spirit, unto the Father. We have boldness to enter into the holiest



only by the blood of Jesus. This is true of the most advanced believers, as well as of the sinner returning for the first time to him from whom he has departed. There can be no real and child-like confidence in our approaches to a holy God, unless we come by the new and living way which the Redeemer hath consecrated for us through the vail—that is to say, his flesh; no intimate and unreserved communings between him and our souls, as children with a father, or as friend with friend, but on the ground of the atonement and intercession of his Son. Hence the exhortation of the apostle, “Having an High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith.”

With regard to the manner in which this communion with God is maintained, there are various ways in which it is kept up; but, speaking generally, it is through the medium of his appointed ordinances. It is chiefly in waiting upon these that God and the soul are brought together, and have fellowship one with another. No man can be said to walk with God who is not much occupied in the reading of his Word. An important part of communion is the free interchange of thoughts; and it is in the Word that God speaks to us. We may hear him talking with us therein—revealing to us his mind and will—telling us what is in his heart; and communicating counsel, warning, consolation, or reproof, suited to our case. The same may be said of the preaching of the Word, which has precisely the same end in view. We do not come to you to make known our own fancies or speculations, or to speak the enticing words of man’s wisdom, but to declare faithfully, as we may be enabled, the whole counsel of God; and, as his accredited ambassadors, to press upon your attention and cordial reception the truth as it is in Jesus. By giving heed to the Word, and occupying ourselves with attentive meditation thereon, in the spirit expressed by the words of Samuel, “Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth. I wait to receive thy counsels, thy commands”—we listen while God speaks. But this is not all that is involved in the idea of communion; it implies also a mutual interchange of thoughts. And God has promised to hear us, also, when we speak to him. He invites us to the privilege of pouring out our hearts before him; telling him our case freely and without reserve—our sins, our sorrows, our wants, our desires; spreading forth all before him, frankly and fully, as to one who is able to do for us exceeding abundantly above what we ask or think, and not less willing than he is able; expressing the sense which we have of his glorious perfections, and rendering to him the tribute of our fervent praise and thanksgivings for all his unmerited goodness to us; casting our burden upon him, whatever it may be, whether of guilt, or fear, or sorrow, or temporal cares; and being careful for nothing, but in ever-

thing, by prayer and supplication, making our requests known unto God. A prayerless man is one that lives without God in the world. It is essential to our walking with him, that we hold frequent converse with him by prayer, laying open to him our whole souls; for it is of the utmost consequence, in order to true and cordial fellowship, that on our part there shall be no secrets which we would fain hide from him, and, especially, no sin lying unconfessed, and unrepented of in the recesses of the heart, no guile or hypocrisy—and, in a word, that we lay open to him our whole souls, and to enjoy the blessed privilege of having Jehovah communing with us from off the merey-seat. As intimately connected with this, and having a most important bearing in the maintenance of real intercourse with God, I may mention, also, the exercises of self-examination and reflection, and of private, retired meditation on our own tate and ways, and on the truth and ways of God. Without much of this, it is hardly possible that a close walk with God can be maintained. We are ever prone to wander from him; and, unless frequently recalled by such exercises as these, imitating the example of the Psalmist, “I thought upon my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies; I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments”—we are apt to go far astray. They are important means of keeping us near to God, and of preserving in vigorous exercise that hidden life of communion which is the spring of the believer’s highest enjoyments, and of his fruitfulness and activity in the service of God.

3. But walking with God includes a third thing, and that is, a walking in the same direction, or towards the same end. There must be a harmony between his will and ours, in order to the fellowship of which we now speak. For how can two walk together except they be agreed? agreed, not only in the sense of their not being at enmity with one another, but agreed in journeying towards the same place, or in pursuing the same end. You will say that two men may walk together in terms of perfect amity, though on different errands, and with different objects in view. Yes, but they will soon part. And so it is with the hypocrite: he will not always call upon God. So it is with self-deceivers. They will appear to follow God, and walk with him so long as their doing so may serve their own private ends; but self being the principle by which they are actuated, while they have no real regard to his glory—as they have ends, in short, not only different, but running counter to his—their true character is by and bye revealed. The great end pursued by God in all his works and dispensations, is his own glory, and none can truly walk with him who are not of the same mind with him in this—actuated by a supreme regard to that end. It is the end of our creation—the end of our redemption—and as the supreme governing principle, should hold sway over all the thoughts and affections

of our hearts, and every department of our conduct. "Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

In regard to every step that we take in life, every undertaking in which we engage, every course of conduct on which we enter, every action of our lives, let us enquire if we are keeping this in view, as the end at which chiefly we are to aim, all others being inferior and insubordinate; for it is just in as far as we are doing so, that we are really walking with God. And as a good practical test for enabling us to determine whether we are doing so or not, let us consider, in regard to anything in which we propose to engage, whether we can ask him to accompany and bless us. If we feel that we could not consistently do this—that we could not expect the Lord to go with us and to bless us, it is certain that, in that thing, whatever it may be, we are not walking with God, but contrary to him.

But, *in the second place*, let us now advert briefly, and by way of practical application, to the excellency and advantages of the course which we have been endeavouring to explain. We might speak of it as a duty of imperative obligation, and press the observance of it upon you from various considerations. But let us rather view it as a privilege, and surely it is entitled to be regarded as one of the most glorious and blessed kind. A poor man would reckon it an honour to be frequently admitted into the presence of his earthly sovereign, and to be allowed to hold intercourse with him in friendly terms. But how much greater the honour of being admitted into the presence of the King of kings, and of being permitted, as often as we choose, to hold free and familiar converse with Him as our teacher, our father, our counsellor, and friend. What dignity in being thus related to God, the fountain of all true honour, and thus privileged to hold communion with him? But in walking with God, there is not only honour, but safety. So long as we remain at a distance from him, we are exposed to the most fearful dangers—an easy prey to the assaults of our spiritual enemies, and, worst of all, exposed to the wrath and curse of God himself. But with him, as children reconciled, we are in safe-guard—if we cleave closely to him, there can no real evil befall us. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty"—protected by his almighty power—guided by his infinite wisdom—upheld by his all-sufficient grace and strength. With the confidence arising from a sense of his presence and favour, the believer is enabled to say, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff comfort me." There is pleasure also in walking with God—a holy peace and joy, of which the world knows nothing, and which it can neither give nor take away. The ungodly are ever apt to think of religion merely as a system of disagreeable restraint. Speak to them of a strict walk with God, and it suggests to them the idea only of a

gloomy and joyless asceticism. But this is because they know not what it is, and have never experienced the joy which springs from communion with a reconciled God. But ask them if *they* have found the way of true happiness and peace, and which of them from the heart could answer that they have. On the contrary, are they not perpetually and restlessly inquiring, Who will shew us any good? and this just because they have not yet found the only true source of solid peace and comfort. But David could say, and so can all those who have been brought nigh to God by the blood of Christ, and enabled truly to walk with him, "Lord, lift thou upon me the light of thy countenance; thou hast put gladness into my heart, more than in the time that their corn and wine abounded." Consider this, ye whose consciences tell you that you are still numbered among the worldly and ungodly; you have tried many ways of happiness, and have often experienced disappointment. But have you ever sought it in him who is the centre and source of all good, or made trial of the pleasures of fellowship with God, as he has revealed himself in Christ? Be assured that in him only can you find that which will fully satisfy the wants of an immortal soul; acquaint yourself with him and be at peace.

*Lastly*, There is profit of the most substantial and enduring kind, connected with walking in the way which the text describes. Solomon tells us "that he that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but the companion of fools shall be destroyed." But how much greater must be the benefit arising from frequent and intimate communion with the only wise God, than with the wisest and best of men. The minds of men are much influenced by the objects with which they are most familiar, and by the character of those persons with whom they are frequently in the habit of conversing. Hence it is, that those who are occupied in base and ignoble pursuits, or who allow their minds to be familiarized with thoughts and images of sin or who associate much with the worldly and ungodly, cannot fail to experience a debasing and corrupting influence. But in fellowship with God, worldly and sinful thoughts are checked, every holy principle and impression is strengthened, and the tendency of all the exercises by means of which it is maintained, is to elevate, improve, and sanctify. "Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord." The nearer we live to God, not only the safer and happier shall we be, but the more also shall we grow in grace, and in meekness for the heavenly inheritance.

## SERMON CXXIII.

REGENERATION.

BY THE LATE REV. JAMES SOMERVILLE, D.D.,\*  
DRUMMELZIER.

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."—Ps. li. 10.

THIS was the prayer of David, when deeply sensible of his own weakness and depravity, and earnestly desirous that he might be enabled to walk with God in newness of life. It is a prayer peculiarly suitable to the situation of those who have been attending a communion table, and who are truly desirous of walking worthy of that holy vocation wherewith they are called. In speaking from these words:

I. Consider the object of David's prayer—a clean heart and a right spirit.

II. Whose work it is to bestow it.

III. What is to be done by us in order to obtain it.

I. The object of David's prayer here is a clean heart and a right spirit.

It is to be observed, that he does not pray merely concerning his outward actions, that they may be all right and just, though on many other occasions this is the object of his prayers. But at this time he

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\* Dr Somerville was born on the 22d November 1764, at Carstairs, near Lanark, was ordained minister of Symington, Lanarkshire, on 3d March 1799, and was translated to the parish of Drummelzier, Peebleshire, in 1810. He left this parish at the Disruption in May 1843, and came to reside in Edinburgh with his family, where he died on the 8th May 1844, having been in very infirm health for many years. Throughout the course of a long ministry he took the deepest interest in all matters tending to the improvement of the government of the Church and the progress of the gospel: and while Moderatism was in its highest ascendancy, he distinguished himself by the ability and courageousness with which he vindicated Presbyterian principles and evangelical truth, in numerous papers which were published in the periodicals of the day, particularly in the "Christian Instructor." With reference to one of these articles, Dr M'Crie spoke in terms of the highest commendation (vide Life, p. 217), in a letter to the late Dr Andrew Thomson. Mr Dunlop has the following notice of him in his Memoir of Dr Welsh. "During the summer vacations he (Dr Welsh) had the advantage of frequent intercourse with the Rev. Dr Somerville of Drummelzier, who was married to his aunt—a godly minister of great learning, and of the soundest views in theology, who, at the latest stage of a long life, while tottering on the brink of the grave, came in to Edinburgh, at the Disruption, to sign, with trembling hands, the Protest and Deed of Demission."

seemst o have been deeply sensible of the natural deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of his heart, and that unless this was rectified, it would be vain to hope that his outward conduct would long be right. He therefore goes to the foundation of religion, the heart and the spirit, and seeks that this foundation may be well laid. Many persons who are not void of all concern about religion, yet fall so far short, that they think of nothing more than merely that their outward actions be properly regulated. Their whole religious efforts are directed in this way, and they have no conception of anything in religion beyond this.

This, however, is a very low and imperfect view of the matter. The God with whom we have to do, is a God who searcheth the hearts of the children of men—a God whose all-discerning eye looks into the deepest recesses of the soul, and who indispensably requireth truth, purity, and holiness in the inward parts. Sin is an abomination in his sight, but it is not the sinful word or the sinful deed alone which he abhors. He discerns and abhors the sinful thought, the sinful wish, the impure desire, as it arises and finds indulgence in the heart. A person may be restrained from sinful words and deeds by many selfish and worldly considerations, which have no influence on his heart ; and there is no doubt that the God who looketh into the heart, sees many a one who bears a fair character before the world, possessed of such a heart as renders him fit for nothing but to be banished from his presence with everlasting destruction.

It is the more necessary to bring this fully into view, because it is an evil into which mankind are exceedingly prone to fall. They are prone to fall into it from two causes. The first is, that they are habituated to act in the world, under the eye of their fellow-creatures, who can look no farther than the outward act, and hence they come gradually to think it unnecessary to attend to anything else. The other cause is, that it is unspeakably easier to attend to outward actions than to cultivate inward religion. It is easier, for instance, to restrain the hands from theft, than the heart from covetousness—easier to abstain from the act of murder, than from the malicious revengeful thought. Nay, so exceedingly difficult is it, and so contrary to all the principles of corrupt nature, that there are scarcely any hardships to which mankind will not rather submit, than to cultivate inward, pure religion. They have been known to part with a large proportion of their worldly substance—to torture themselves with fastings and scourgings—to submit to severe penances and painful pilgrimages—to every hardship which a blind and cruel superstition could impose—and all these, severe and hard as they certainly were, yet were felt more easy and

agreeable to corrupt nature, than to cleanse the heart from sin, to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God—to cultivate that holiness without which no man shall see God.

All this, however, is utterly vain. It is a holy God with whom we have to do—a Spirit, who must be served in spirit and in truth. He is a God who must be glorified, not only with our bodies, but with our spirits, which are his. He declares, not only the outward act, but the very thought of wickedness to be sin. He tells us that it is out of the heart that evil thoughts, murders, &c., proceed. He therefore says, thou blind Pharisee, thou formal professor, who trustest in thy outward observances and actions, without regarding the state of thy heart, cleanse first that which is within; otherwise thou wilt be but as a whited sepulchre, beautiful without, but inwardly full of all manner of corruption. “Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God.” “Cleanse yourselves, therefore, from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God.” How could any person hope to be pleasing in the sight of God, if he knew that the all-seeing God perceived his heart to be full of sin? How could such a person enter the presence of God, and be meet for that inheritance which is “incorruptible, undefiled, and which fadeth not away.” Nay, though this were not the case, the cultivation of vital heart religion is necessary, as a suitable spring and principle, from which all right outward conduct may flow; for there can be no dependence placed on any man’s outward conduct being long and uniformly right, unless it proceed from a right principle within.

For these reasons David prays for inward heart religion, and every true servant of God is deeply concerned in this matter.

It is a *clean heart* and a *right spirit* which David here desires. A clean heart is a heart freed from the defilement of evil desires, corrupt inclinations, and sinful propensities. All sin is represented in Scripture as defilement and pollution. Holiness is represented as cleanness or purity. A clean heart, therefore, is a heart which is delivered from the love of sin, in every shape in which it may present itself, which, instead of delighting in sin, loathes and abhors it.

In the corrupt heart, sinful thoughts and desires spring up continually, even as waters in a living fountain. The whole motions of the carnal mind are carnal, worldly, sinful. Hence the Scripture declares, that in such persons dwelleth no good thing. Every imagination of the thoughts of their hearts is only evil, and that continually. From the moment they awake, until they retire to rest, their whole heart and mind are employed in thoughts of worldliness, or ambition, or pride, or covetousness, envy, malice, hatred, discontent, or lust. It is a conti-

nual ebullition of evil. Indeed, it cannot be otherwise; for all being corrupt within, nothing but what is corrupt can come forth.

The clean heart is very different; its natural spontaneous movement is in good and holy thoughts, inclinations, and desires. These arise, not merely when they are put into it by external means, as by the preaching of the Word, or the reading of the Scriptures, or by serious conversation, but flow from it naturally, as waters from a fountain, because there is a spring and principle within, which naturally produces them. These holy thoughts, desires, and inclinations are not unmingled nor constant, because the hearts of the best are not completely cleansed in this world; but though not constant, they are predominant. Unholy, impure desires and thoughts do not arise continually and freely, as they do in the hearts of the unrenewed; and when they do arise, they are not delighted in and indulged, but checked and banished.

These circumstances form the leading difference between the clean and the unclean heart in a present world. In the spirits of just men made perfect, these depraved propensities will need no watching or checking, because they will never arise. All being then thoroughly cleansed within, this warfare of the flesh lusting against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, which occasions so much pain in a present life, will be known no more. It will continue, however, to a certain degree, in this world; but the more freedom from it that any one attains in this world, so much the happier will he be in himself, and so much the greater evidence will he have that he is a genuine servant of God, and an heir of eternal glory. It is both the duty and the interest of every one to seek for the highest measures of inward purity and holiness.

A *right spirit* seems to denote much the same thing as a clean heart; only, there may, perhaps, be this difference—the clean heart may denote the absence of evil thoughts, inclinations, and desires; and the right spirit, the presence of those which are holy, good, and right. What God requires of us is, not merely a negative goodness—the mere absence of evil, but the presence and possession of that which is right and good. The first thing to be done, no doubt, is, to cease to do evil; but, in addition to this, we are to learn to do well. God has given us active powers, and these powers are to be employed in that which is right. The spirit and temper of mind is to be rightly disposed towards God and towards man, predominantly and habitually. God is to be loved supremely, submitted to unreservedly, and trusted in entirely. His law is to be loved, his service is to be loved; and he is to be delighted in as the portion and felicity of the soul. Mankind, also, are to be loved; and a spirit of kindness, meekness, candour, charity,



mercy, truth, and justice towards them, is continually to be maintained. A right spirit consists of a temper, dispositions, and principles ruling in the heart to promote the glory of God and the happiness, present and eternal, of the human race.

This, then, is the object of David's prayer, that all might be right within; and he knew, that as out of the heart are the issues of life, so, in proportion as he possessed the clean heart and right spirit, all would be right in his outward conduct, and that thus he would be enabled to glorify God, both in his body and in his spirit, both in his heart and by his life.

II. We are to consider, *whose work it is to bestow the clean heart and right spirit.* It is evident that David considered it as the work of God, else why did he pray to God for it? Inexperienced persons—persons who are unacquainted with the depths of depravity in the heart, or whose views of religion are very superficial, think it an easy matter to rectify all that is wrong in them. They imagine that they themselves are quite equal to the work—that the strength of their own resolutions, aided by the means which they have in their power to use, can accomplish all that is needful. But those who have more extensive self-acquaintance, and whose views of religion are more deep and spiritual, always refer this work to God; and while they do not think themselves warranted to sit still in spiritual sloth, still look to God as he who alone can work in them both to will and to do of his own good pleasure. Indeed, the greatness of the work evinces it to be of God and not of man. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil.” To change the whole bent and current of the thoughts, affections, inclinations, desires, motives, and principles; to render them not only different from, but often directly contrary to what they were before, is a work which nothing less than Almighty power can accomplish. In their natural corrupt state, they are so far from being either willing or able to do this for themselves, that they will not believe the necessity of any such change they are utterly averse to it, and struggle to the utmost of their power against those who would use any means to accomplish it. God, therefore, declares it to be his own work. “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruit of his creatures.” “It is God who worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” The very lowest of all good dispositions—the disposition to attend seriously to the means of grace—is ascribed to God. “The Lord opened the heart of Lydia, that she attended to the things which were spoken by Paul.” Faith is expressly styled his gift; Eph.

ii. 8. So is repentance; Acts xi. 18. Love to God and to man, and all the happy fruits of these graces—joy, peace, long-suffering, &c., are the fruits and work of the Spirit, Gal. v. 22. The promises of God, also, direct them to look to him as the great agent in this work. “I will circumcise their heart, and the heart of their seed, that they may love the Lord their God with all their heart and soul, and that they may live,” Deut. xxx. 6. Again, “But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: After those days, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be my people.” Jer. xxxi. 33. Again, “I will give them one heart, and will put a new spirit within them; and I will take away the hard and stony heart out of them, and will give them an heart of flesh, that they may fear me, and keep my statutes, and walk in my ordinances,” Ezek. xi. 19. God desires to have the glory of all his works of creation, providence, and grace; and all his true servants are willing to ascribe the whole glory to his name; “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth’s sake.”

The text also points out in what way God accomplishes this work. Two expressions are used to denote this—“Create” and “Renew.” Both these expressions are frequently used in Scripture; and they point out to us how great and radical a change it is; and also intimate that it is a Divine power alone which can accomplish it. “We are his workmanship, *created* again,” &c., Eph. ii. 10; “Put on the new man, which after God is *created* in righteousness,” &c., Eph. iv. 24; “Be *renewed* in the spirit of your mind,” Eph. iv. 23; “He saved us by the *renewing* of the Holy Ghost,” Titus iii. 5. Not that we are to suppose that those who are the subjects of this work have new powers and faculties put into them which they did not possess before. This new creation, or renovation, is merely a changing of the powers and faculties which a person always possessed from evil to good, from sin to holiness.

For instance, every person possesses the power of the will; but, in the exercise of this power, an unrenewed man wills to neglect God, to neglect his own soul, to neglect duty, and to live under the dominion of ungodliness and worldly lusts. His will is quite contrary to the will of God. They who have undergone this new creation, or, more properly, renovation, exercise their will in a quite different manner. It is their will to seek and serve God, to attend to their own souls, to abstain from sin, to do their duty, to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly. Their will, so far as it is renewed, is conformed in all things to the will of God. So likewise of their affections. They are originally placed entirely on some created object. Every unrenewed man loves the world, or the things that are in the

world, in one shape or another. He delights in them as his portion, and has an aversion to objects which are spiritual and divine. But in the man whose heart and mind are renewed after the image of God, the affections exercise themselves on quite different objects. God is loved with all the heart. God's law is delighted in. Objects spiritual and divine appear amiable and excellent; objects earthly, carnal, and sensual, appear mean and contemptible; the affections are taken away from those objects on which they were formerly placed, and are set on those things which are above. So with regard to all the powers; they remain the same as to their substance, but the exercise of them is quite different. In this respect all old things are done away, and all things become new. The hopes, fears, joys, griefs, desires, and aversions of mankind are all exercised on different objects, and in a different manner from what they were before.

There are two points to be considered in this work; *1st*, Its beginning; *2dly*, Its progress. With regard to its beginning, it is entirely of God. It is God who, by his mighty power, gives the whole heart and mind a new bias. But, though it is his power which accomplishes this new creation and renovation, his power is exerted in the use of certain means, especially the word of the truth of the gospel. "Of his own will begat he us, with the word of truth," James i. 18. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul. The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes," Ps. xix. But though his Word be the means which he uses, we are not to imagine that it is sufficient to effect such a change by its own power. "Paul may plant, and Apollos may water, but God alone giveth the increase: so then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase," 1 Cor. iii. 6, 7.

With regard to the progress of the work, it is also dependent on the power of God. As some have considered the preservation of the material world as a continued creation, so may we consider the preservation of these spiritual qualities in the soul. As in the natural world he upholds all things by the word of his power, and as in him we live, and move, and breathe, and have our being, so it is also in the kingdom of grace. *Of him, and to him, and through him* are all things, to whom be glory for ever and ever. "We are God's husbandry, we are God's building." In this also he uses means, and these means are his Word and his providence, enlightening, convincing, influencing, and stirring up to labour with all diligence, and to watch with all care, that sin may be mortified, and every holy and right disposition confirmed and strengthened. As he causes the corn to spring up and to grow, first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear, by the influences of the sun and rain as secondary causes, but as truly by his own power as if he

used no secondary causes, so it is also in the beginning and progress of the Christian life.

III. What is to be done by us to obtain this new heart and right spirit? This subject has been the occasion of much controversy, and wide are the differences of opinion as to what is our part and what is God's part in this work. We shall endeavour to treat it as much as possible in a practical manner, and, in doing so, shall divide mankind into two different classes, and consider what is to be done by each.

The first class consists of those who have no sense of their need of a clean heart, and no desire to obtain it. It is an idle question what such persons can do, or whether they can do anything at all in this work; for, while they continue in this state of mind, it is manifest that they will do nothing. Are they then to be left in a hopeless state, without any means being used for their conversion? By no means. But all the means which are used must be used by others. Their ministers, their friends, their Christian neighbours, must labour by instruction, by example, and by prayer, to bring them to a sense of their depravity and guilt, and of the necessity of a clean heart and right spirit. These are the means which God usually blesses for this end; but if these fail, the case appears hopeless as far as mere human means are concerned: for whatever they *might* do for themselves in the way of reading, praying, hearing, and meditating, we are sure they *will* do nothing, while they have no sense of their need of a new heart, and no desire to obtain it. As far as means are concerned, the salvation of these persons depends on others, and this should be a powerful motive with all who have any regard for the glory of God, and for the good of immortal souls, to be unwearied in their endeavours to bring blind, careless sinners to a sense of their unhappy state.

But there is another class whose case deserves most serious consideration, that is, those who are sensible of their need of a new heart, and who are earnestly desirous to obtain it. This is a most interesting case, and deserves the utmost attention. Though it is often a distressing, yet it may be considered as a very hopeful case. It is evident that the power and grace of God have been at work with them, so far as to enlighten them to see the necessity of a clean heart and a right spirit, and to give them an earnest desire to obtain it. This is of God, for they do not possess it by nature, and they could not give it to themselves. It is God's method of bestowing it, first to give a deep sense of its importance and necessity, and an earnest desire to obtain it, and, when this is accomplished, a most important step is gained on the corrupt mind. The desire of the new heart may not be the new heart in the fullest sense, but it is certainly quite a new state compared with the

state of those who have not the least sense of their need of this, nor desire to obtain it. It is also a very important step in this point of view, that being from God, it is a proof of God's concern about that person—a proof that God has not left him to a reprobate mind, to walk on in darkness till he perish in destruction. It may also give some ground to hope, that he who has thus begun a good work will also finish it. But what we would chiefly remark at present is, that this desire of a new heart is important, because it brings a person into that state in which he can do something for himself. In bringing a person to a sense of the need of a new heart, and a desire after it, the whole must be by the power of God through the means of others; but when a man has been brought thus far, he is to be carried forward by the same power of God, but in a great measure through the instrumentality of himself. This doctrine of man's working out his own salvation has been greatly abused, to the diminution of the grace of God, and to the exciting of pride and self-importance in man. But, though it has been abused by being carried so far on one side, we must beware of committing the same fault by carrying it too far on the other, but declare the truth distinctly as it appears in Scripture, and is found agreeing with the experience of God's faithful servants. It appears, then, that nothing can be done in any stage of the work but by the grace and power of God; but it equally appears that, in certain stages of the work, our own powers are all to be exercised, or we have no reason to expect the grace and power of God. Thus, when our Saviour declares that without him we can do nothing, he directs us at the same time "to abide in him." This is our part in the carrying on of the business in which we are to labour. The apostle Paul also, when he declares that it is God who worketh in him both to will and to do of his good pleasure, directs us to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling." It is a great and radical error to teach mankind to depend on their own exertions, and to overlook the power and grace of God; but it is no less an error to lead them to live in a state of negligence and inactivity, passively waiting for that power and grace, and not doing what God has empowered and required them to do.

We return, then, to the question, What is to be done by those who are really desirous to obtain a clean heart and a right spirit? To this we answer, that the chief thing they have to do is, to follow the Psalmist's example, and to pray to God to give it to them. Under the second head of discourse we shewed that it is the work of God,—the effect of his creating, renewing power; and, if this be the case, then that which a person in this situation has chiefly to do is, to apply to God with earnestness and perseverance to obtain it. God is a free agent, who doth whatever he pleaseth, and over whom we have no compulsory power. "The wind bloweth where it listeth," uncontrollable by men, so

also is the way of his Spirit. All, therefore, that we can do, is humbly to implore him that he will be pleased to give us his Spirit to renew us after his own image.

But it may be asked, what prospect of success is there in doing this? In answer to this, we would remind the humble inquirer of the divine command, the divine promise and faithfulness. It is God's command; "For all these things will I be inquired at by the house of Israel." It is his promise, that none shall seek his face in vain. It is his command and promise united, "Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened," and faithful is he who hath promised. It is true, indeed, that mankind do pray for blessings which they do not receive, but that is either owing to them not asking right objects, or not asking in a right manner. So says the apostle James, "Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it on your lusts." Now, if men ask wrong objects, or for wrong ends, we are not to expect that God will hear them; but a clean heart and a right spirit is the rightest of all the objects we can pray for—the most important and necessary both for the glory of God and for our happiness; and it can scarcely happen that any person can ask that blessing from wrong motives or for wrong ends. If there be any blessing whatever that we may be assured God will give, we may depend upon his giving the clean heart and right spirit to those who ask him. The desire which he has given them of obtaining that blessing is so far a pledge that he will give it if they persevere in seeking. This desire after it, is part of that preparation of the heart which cometh from him; and when he thus prepares the hearts of any to seek his face, then is the time for him to incline his ear and hear.

But farther, the person who desires the right heart and clean spirit, in doing that part of the work which is incumbent on him, has to use all possible diligence, by meditation, reading, and hearing divine truth, and earnest prayer, that his sense of the necessity of a new heart, and his desire after it, may not decay. He should study to see more clearly the beauty and excellence of holiness, the evil and deformity of sin, and the absolute necessity of being conformed to the divine image, in order to his being admitted into the presence of God and enjoying him in glory. And having his mind deeply impressed with these things, he should pray earnestly, with all prayer and supplication, and watch thereunto with all perseverance, waiting on God as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and as the God of mercy through Christ, pleading his mercy and unmerited grace in Christ Jesus, and looking to this as the only ground of his hope; and at the same time using, with the utmost diligence, all the means of God's appointment, and holding on in this course, he will not be finally disappointed.

SERMON CXXVI.

THE SINNER MARRIED TO THE LAW—THE BELIEVER MARRIED TO THE LORD.

BY THE REV. JOHN LYON, BROUGHTY FERRY.

“Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.”—ROMANS vii. 4.

In addressing the believers at Rome in this and the preceding verses of the chapter, the apostle speaks of a first and second marriage. He represents the law as the believer's first husband, and Jesus as his second. The first marriage, he says, must be dissolved before the second can be contracted, and the second must be contracted before fruit can be brought forth to God. The truths of the passage may be stated in a series of propositions as follows:—

I. The believer was at one time *married to the law*.

II. The believer is now *married to the Lord*.

III. Before a person can be married to the Lord, *his marriage with the law must be dissolved*.

IV. It is only when the first marriage is dissolved, and the second contracted, *that fruit is brought forth unto God*.

On these truths, let us meditate for a time; and may God grant us his blessing, so that, whether married to the law or married to the Lord, we may be profited.

I. Let me first direct your attention to the truth, that the sinner, before believing, is *married to the law*. This is implied in the text, and assumed in the illustration which the apostle is here pursuing. His language plainly intimates, that the unbelieving sinner is married to the law. “Wherefore, my brethren, ye are become dead to the law by the body of Christ, that ye should be married to *another*.”

In addressing you on this part of the subject, I shall endeavour to describe the nature of this marriage.

(1.) Notice, then, in the outset, that this marriage, like every other, *involves certain obligations*—obligations that correspond to those that grow out of the conjugal relation. The duties of a married pair are stated by the apostle in a few words. The husband, he informs us, is

the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the Church, and his duty is to live with her, provide for her, and love her as Christ loved the Church. The wife's duty, on the other hand, is to be subject to her husband in all things, consulting his will, and acting faithfully for his interests. "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands as unto the Lord, for the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is head of the Church. Therefore, as the Church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing." If the law, then, be the sinner's husband, the sinner is bound, by Divine authority, to be subject to this husband in all things. We may say to sinners, in the language of the apostle, "Submit yourselves unto your own husband as unto the Lord." This is your duty, and it is also your interest. The ten rules of your husband's house are equitable and good, tending as much to promote your own happiness as his honour. In observing them, you are not only discharging a *duty*, but enjoying a *privilege*.

(2.) But another circumstance worthy of notice is, that *this marriage is of the Lord*. In the strictest sense of the words, God has joined the parties together; the marriage was made in heaven. As soon as he is born, the sinner is espoused to the law, yea, before he is born or able to give his consent. "But is this fair," you will say, "that the sinner should be married without his consent, and to a partner for whom he has no love." In this case, I answer, it is perfectly fair; for the potter has perfect power over the clay to fashion it into whatever form or for whatever use he pleases. There is nothing unfair in placing a sinner under a constitution which is perfectly good, and that, too, without asking his consent. God has certainly a good right to dispose of his creatures after they are made. If he has not a right to do this without their consent, he has not a right to create them at all without their consent. But to say so is not only most wicked, but most absurd. It is just as fair for God to marry the sinner to the law without his consent as to bring him into existence without his consent.

But, in one sense, the sinner has consented to the union. While our first parents were yet in Paradise, and in a state of innocence, they consented for themselves and their offspring to be married to the law. The whole human family existed in the persons of Adam and Eve when God made the covenant with them, and when they consented to that covenant, their whole family consented with them and in them; so that the marriage after all is not consummated without the consent of parties. But you say this again is unfair, that the parents should consent for the children. I reply, as before, it is the Divine arrangement, and is perfectly fair. Were you yourselves present with Adam and Eve when the covenant was made with them, say, would you or would you not consent



along with them to be placed under this covenant? You could not refuse and be innocent. Well, can it be wrong for them to have done that for you in your absence which it would certainly be your duty to do for yourself were you present? Certainly not. There was nothing wrong in our first parents consenting for themselves and their offspring to be under the covenant of works—in other words, to be united to the law; and, had they acted faithfully, no objection against the arrangement had ever been heard of. It would have been extolled as full of benevolence, and wisdom, and goodness. Their error consisted not in consenting to the covenant for themselves and their children, but in violating the covenant to which they had consented.

(3.) But the chief reason why so many objections are made against this marriage is, that it is an *unhappy marriage*. In the case of unhappy marriages, it is commonly remarked, perhaps truly, that there is fault on both sides. Can this be said of the marriage now referred to? It cannot; for in this case, the fault is all on one side. The husband is to blame in nothing, for he is uniformly holy, just, and good. His demands are, indeed, most strict, but they are most reasonable and wise, His character is the very transcript of the Divine character; he is the very image of the Son of God. The spouse that faithfully does his will is sure of perfect happiness and peace. But if he be once offended, woe then, to the offender. He will never again speak a kind word—he will wear a perpetual frown upon his brow—he will no more address the offender except in threatening and wrathful tones. Now, you will observe that the spouse has offended, yea, offended a thousand times over. She has violated his commands again and again—she has done so in the face of frowns and threatenings, and hence all the miseries of the marriage.

You perceive, then, that the sinner's connection with the law is a dreadful one. Once offended, this husband will never again be reconciled. If it were possible by the discharge of duties for the future, or by the cherishing of sorrow for the past—if by any means it were possible to pacify his anger, and secure his forgiveness, the case were not so fearful. But it is impossible—once offended he is offended always; he will not forget, and he will not forgive a single fault. Plead what you will he remains inflexible, unchanged. Suppose you expostulate with him, and say, "I wish to do thy will," he will reply, "speak not of wishes, but *do it, do it.*" "But I have done it in almost every particular, may I not be restored to favour?" No. It is not enough that my will be almost done, it must be altogether done. "But I am *sorry* for the past, and mean to *reform*, and not to transgress any more." You may be sorrowful, and you may reform, but I pay no regard to sorrows or to reformation. You have already proved unfaithful to my interests,

and it matters not now what you do, you cannot repair the injury you have done. "But may I not be forgiven, and I shall do better in time to come?" No, you may not be forgiven—there is no forgiveness in my nature—I have said, and I will abide by it, the soul that sinneth it shall die.

(4.) But such an unhappy marriage, it is said, were well dissolved. The parties were better asunder than united, seeing matters are as have been described. This may be true, but the marriage is *not easily dissolved*. It is always a difficult thing to break a marriage that is legally formed. It is especially so in the case before us. In ordinary cases the wife may desert her husband, or obtain a separation by means of a divorce. But desertion or divorce is impossible in this case. You cannot by any contrivance escape from your husband, or cut the connection that binds you together. That connection, we have seen, was appointed by the Divine mind: it was formed by God himself. What therefore God has joined together, man must not put asunder. He cannot—he dare not.

No. The husband, though deeply injured, will not consent to a separation. You may disregard his will, and treat his commands with indifference, or even with contempt. You may become so depraved as almost to forget that he has any claim upon you. But he will follow you still, and assert his right to you as long as you live. There is one way of escape which you may adopt, and only one—the way pointed at in the text, namely, to get married to him that was raised from the dead. Once united to Jesus, you are safe, and the law is satisfied. Your second husband will give ample satisfaction to your first. He will vindicate the honour of the law, take all your responsibilities on himself, and deliver you from all the miseries that have rendered life a burden, as well as from those that you may have in prospect. Christ saves not only from temporal fears, but also from the fears of a dark and lowering eternity. But the desirableness of union to Jesus will more fully appear as I go on to speak on the second general truth proposed, viz.

II. *The believer is married to the Lord.* "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ, that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God." Christ receiveth sinners that feel wretched under the law, and espouseth them to himself for ever. If you consent to have Jesus as your husband and head; if you give him your hand and your heart in it, then you are his from that moment, you are married to the Lord. In treating this part of the subject, I shall follow the method I have already adopted, and give a short description of the second marriage as I have done of the first.

(1.) Of the second marriage you may notice just as of the first, that it *involves certain obligations*. The spouse is bound just as before to be subject to her husband in all things, to consult his will, and act faithfully for his interests. The husband is different, but there is no difference as regards her obligation to be subject to her husband. That obligation is still the same, and the rules of the house by which her conduct is to be regulated are still the same. The identical regulations of the first husband are found word for word in the house of the second. "If ye love me," saith Christ, pointing to these regulations, "keep *my* commandments." "He that hath *my* commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me."

(2.) But again, you may notice that this marriage, just like the former, is *of the Lord*, though it is never consummated *without the consent of parties*. The believer is espoused to Christ before he is born, but the marriage is not completed until consent is given freely and cordially. *Freely* I say and *cordially*, for there must be no equivocation in the matter, no mental reservation whatever. You must *really* and *heartily* consent to be Christ's on his own terms, or the marriage cannot go on.

But mark the wonders of Christ's love! In order to bring sinners to consent, he has instituted a variety of means. He has provided the Spirit to operate on their hearts, and make them willing in the day of his power. He has also provided means of an external kind: he has instituted the Christian ministry for the express purpose of bringing the matter before the attention of sinners, and urging them, in God's name, to give their consent to his proposals. Like Abraham's servant, every man in the ministry is bound to go to the intended bride and tell her of the riches and honours of his master's son, in order to gain her consent. Like Eliezer, he is to address himself to the God that is above, praying for success as if every thing depended on his prayers; while at the same time he is to urge the matter on the attention of the bride as earnestly and faithfully as if all depended on his negotiations with her.

Now, then, we are ambassadors for Christ, we are, like Eliezer, sent out by our master to speak in his name, and act for his interests; and, like him, we would press you to come to a decision without further delay. "Now, if you will deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me, and if not, tell me, that I may turn to the right hand or to the left." My master has sent me forth to solicit sinners to give their hearts to Jesus. I am laid under solemn obligation to discharge this duty with earnestness and fidelity; and therefore I ask in his name, are you willing to acquiesce in his proposals? are you willing to be delivered from the bondage of the law, and to be united to the Son of God? Do you give your heart's consent to be Christ's on his own terms? "Now

if ye will deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me, and if not, tell me, that I may turn to the right hand or to the left." Awakened, restless soul, wilt thou go with this man—wilt thou consent to be Christ's?

(3.) But to show you the wisdom of what I now advise, I go on to observe, that this second marriage *is a happy marriage*. It is as happy as the other is miserable. That which makes it so happy is, that it is a marriage with the Lord. The believing sinner is so closely united to Jesus, that he is one spirit, and one flesh with him—a member of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones, &c. Now, Christ loves that sinner as he loves himself; he regards him as part of himself; "and no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it." Now what more could any human being desire? In having Christ, you have all things. You have pardon of sin, freedom from condemnation, strength for duty, support amid trials, and a title to everlasting glory. As Elkanah said to his disconsolate spouse, so Christ says to his—"Am not I better to thee than ten sons?" Thou art grieving after this and that, as if thou hadst not a better portion. Am not I myself better to thee than all these though they were thine? Is not my righteousness sufficient to cover thee—my spirit to sanctify—my arm to save?

(4.) But, to crown the whole, this marriage with Jesus Christ *is one that can never be dissolved*. The connection with the law cannot easily be broken, but this connection cannot be broken at all. Whom Christ espouses, he *espouses for ever*. He never loses his affection, and his covenant can never fail. If he is once thy husband, then "the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord, that hath mercy on thee."

May the spouse then do as she pleases, since the covenant cannot fail, or Christ's love change? No; it does not follow that she may, though this is the wicked inference that some deduce from the doctrine. Does a woman feel encouraged to insult her husband, because she knows he will not proceed to the extreme measure of putting her away? I suppose not. She knows he has various ways of expressing his displeasure, though he does not insist on a separation. The want of his love, the frown on his face, will be felt by an affectionate woman to be dreadful enough, without anything else. So here—the spouse of Jesus Christ is never encouraged to transgress, because she knows Christ abides faithful. As the husband has various ways of expressing his disapprobation, without putting away his wife, so has Christ; and he will take care that the person who is encouraged to sin because of the stability of his covenant, and the faithfulness of his love, will be made soon and sore to rue his presumption. And yet Christ will see to it that all who

are married to him shall eventually be safe. On the great day when the marriage is to be publicly celebrated in the heavenly kingdom, Christ shall see to it that all are there for whom he died, and to whom he was united. Were even one absent on that day — one whom the angels had in their haste overlooked or forgotten, as they gathered the elect from the four winds of heaven, Christ would not be satisfied in the absence of that one. He would descend again from the throne of his glory, and ransack the whole creation in search of this absent soul, and the joys of the marriage-day would be suspended until that soul was found. Christ has done too much for his Church to suffer any of her members to perish.

Now, seeing these things are so, it is the interest of all to be united to the Lord Jesus, and it should be their concern. Looking, on the one hand, at the miseries of the first marriage here and hereafter; and, on the other, at the immunities and blessedness of the second marriage, which not only leads to happiness and peace in this world, but to everlasting glory in the world to come, every sinner must see that a change is not only desirable, but necessary. He should make it his supreme concern to make a transition from the one state to the other—to have his connection with the law severed, and to be in union with the Lord. But how is this transition to be made? What is necessary in order to be married to the Lord? In answering this question, I proceed to the next head of discourse, and observe that,

III. Before a person can be married to the Lord, his *marriage with the law must be dissolved.*

(1.) The first marriage must be dissolved before a second can be lawfully contracted. This is in accordance at once with the law of God and with the law of man, and the Apostle assumed it as a truth admitted and well known. You are aware, he in effect says to his brethren, how that the law is binding on a married pair as long as they both are alive. If either marry a second time while the other is alive, the sin of adultery is committed—the law affecting husband and wife is outraged, and the offending party is exposed to the wrath of the injured law. Now so is it in regard to your connection with the law of God. As long as you both are alive—you and the law—the marriage must stand—it cannot legally be dissolved. “Know ye not, brethren—for I speak to them that know the law—how that the law hath dominion over a man *as long as he liveth.*”

(2.) How, then, is it possible for a sinner who is married to the law to be set at liberty? If the law has dominion over him as long as he liveth, it would seem impossible to dissolve the connection? It is,

indeed impossible, as long as the sinner liveth—nothing but *death* can dissolve the union. Take good notice, then, of this—that *the sinner's marriage with the law is dissolved ONLY BY DEATH*. Wherefore, my brethren, ye must become dead to the law before ye can be married to him that was risen from the dead, or bring forth fruit unto God. *Ye must*. Observe that it is not the death of the husband that dissolves the connection, but the death of the wife. No doubt the death of either party would dissolve it, but the husband cannot die; he is immortal and unchangeable as God himself—necessarily and eternally immortal. It is your death, sinner, that must cut the connection that binds you together, if ever that connection is cut at all. Your husband the law can *never, never die*.

Some people speak as if it were the *death of the law* that dissolved the marriage, and not the death of the sinner. But such a mode of speaking is injudicious, to say the least of it. It may have the countenance of some great and venerated names to support it, but it has not, as far as I can see, the countenance of Paul, or of any of the apostles. In the passage that forms my text, he says to the believers at Rome, that *they had become dead*, but he does not say that *the law had become dead*. In the sixth verse of this chapter, he indeed seems to say it—our English version makes him say it—but it is not his doctrine. Let us look at the passage. “But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held,” &c. Here the law is represented as being dead—our version evidently teaches this doctrine, but such as understand Greek will see at a glance that the commonly-received text gives no countenance to this idea. Instead of teaching that the law is dead, it clearly affirms that it is the parties that are delivered from the law that are dead—“But now we are delivered from the law, *we being dead* to that wherein we are held—being dead to that law by whose authority we are held bound, that we should serve God in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.”

(3.) But if it be the spouse that dies in order to dissolve the connection, how can she be married to another? It is not the party that dies, but the party that survives, that gets married a second time. How then do you explain this matter? I shall show you how, and, in coming to this topic, we are coming to the very marrow of the Gospel—we are coming within sight of the manifold wisdom of God. Observe, then, that the spouse that dies in order to be married to another, dies not *personally*, but by *substitute*—*she dies by the body of Christ*. “Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law *by the body of Christ*.”

The *body of Christ* here signifies the person of Christ. It is as if

the Apostle had said, ye have died to the law in the *person* of your Lord, your representative and head. When he died upon the cross, he died as a public person—the representative of his people—the substitute of his spouse. Justice demanded that you should die, and would, on no account, recede from her demand. So Christ came forward as your substitute, and died in your stead—*died to the law—died under it*. Now, being represented by Christ, your substitute, ye were virtually in his person or body when he died, and so ye are become dead to the law *by the body* of Christ.

Think, then, of your obligations to the Lord Jesus. He saw you heavy and heartbroken in the house of your first husband. He heard the awful demand that was made on you to do and to suffer. He listened and heard the law distinctly say to you that *you must die*, so he came forward and offered to die in your stead. The law was satisfied with the offer, and his best blood soon streamed to the ground. And now every believing sinner may say, “I am dead to the law by the body of Christ. When the law put him to death, it put me to death. When it crucified him, it crucified me.” Think, then, believer, of your obligations to the Saviour. You admire the generosity of the Armenian prince we have read of, that proposed to the conqueror to give his life as the ransom of his bride, what say you to the generosity of Jesus, that actually laid down his life for his? What say you to the love of Jesus, that gave his life for *you*. The bride of the Armenian was so overcome by hearing the words of her husband proposing to give his life for hers, that she could attend to nothing else, could think of none besides. “What did you think of Cyrus, our conqueror,” said her husband to her, after they had both got their life and liberty from him, “what did you think of Cyrus?” “I never observed him,” said she. “Never observed Cyrus! what were you thinking about?” “I was thinking of that man that proposed to give his life for mine. I could think of nothing else, I could see none besides.” Learn ye, friends, a lesson of this queen. Certainly if we had realising views of Christ’s love towards us, we would often feel as she did, unable to think of anything else than the love of that Saviour that unsolicited gave his life for ours. Herein, indeed, is love, and if Christ’s professed spouse refuse after this to return the affection, we must say in the language of the Apostle, let her be anathema maranatha—accursed with a curse when her Lord shall come.

But it is not in a legal sense merely that the believer dies to the law, he dies to it *in spirit*—his *hope dies*, his *self-righteous confidence dies*. Married to the law he was at one time alive, cherishing the hope of being able to please it, and ultimately to enter glory. But “the

commandment came, sin revived, and he died." Through the law itself he became dead to the law. Its spirituality, its exceeding breadth and purity, put an end to his legal hopes and dependencies. The law disapproved of his best doings—it was never pleased; it always found fault; it uttered its threatenings evermore; it thundered wrath to the uttermost against him, until at last he saw that under this law he was a dead man, and had nothing to expect from it but indignation and wrath. His heart sank within him—his confidence failed—*he died.*

Thus, through *the law itself* he became dead to the law. But observe that it is not the law, *apart from the body of Christ*; but the law *as magnified and made honourable in that body.* When the sinner gets a right discovery of Christ's person on the cross, he sees more than ever he did before the awful strength and vengeance of the law. If the spouse is alarmed and reduced to the borders of despair, when she hears her husband's *words*, she dies altogether when she beholds his *doings*. In looking to the cross, she beholds him assailing the very Son of God, and executing on him all that was threatened against her. She sees him wrestling with the great Immanuel, casting him down, and nailing him to a cross, until he bowed his blessed head and gave up the ghost. This sight makes her heart die within her, for she plainly perceives now that her husband is determined to keep his word, and to carry into effect the most terrible things he has spoken. She cannot now venture into his presence—she no longer hopes to appease his anger by her repentance, or her reformation, or her fair promises, or her holy duties. "As for me," she says, "my hope is cut off. After what I have discovered at the cross, I can no longer entertain the hope that I may yet please my husband, and live at peace with him. I now see that, rather than change his mind, he would overturn creation, he would shake the universe asunder. He has assaulted and put to death the Lord of glory, and for no other reason than that he took my part, and offered to make amends for my doings. Wo is me, for I am undone, in being united to such a husband as this!"

Now here is a case for Jesus to take up. Here is the case of a woman who is dead to her husband the law—*dead by the body of Christ*—a case far from being common. The many are contented in their present connection, or at least are not so discontented as to desire a change. But here is a woman that must make a change; she feels undone in her present connection; she feels she must have Christ or die. Now this is a person that Christ will not disregard. She is a woman, forsaken and grieved in spirit, in a state of destitution, and well nigh in a state of despair. Therefore Christ will see to it that



she be relieved at the proper time and in the proper way. He will speak peace to her in some such language as the following. "Thy Maker is thy husband, the Lord of Hosts is his name." Thou shalt no more be termed forsaken and desolate, but Hephzibah shall be thy name, to denote that the Lord delights in thee. Thou shalt be called Beulah, to signify that thou art married to the Lord."

Thus you see that, at the very time the spouse becomes dead to the law, she becomes united to the Lord. In the order of nature, her death to the law is before her marriage to the Lord, but in the order of time they go together. The date of her death is also the date of her marriage; hence there is mourning and rejoicing on the same day. There is a strange mixture of emotions experienced, which it is difficult to describe. There is grief and joy mixed and mingled—a pleasing grief and a mournful joy. But the whole of the phenomena is explained by the fact, that the bride dies on the day of her marriage—that there is a death and a marriage on the same day.

Thus I have shown that before a person can be married to the Lord his marriage with the law must be dissolved. (1.) The dissolution of the first marriage makes the second legal. (2.) This dissolution is brought about by *death alone*—the death of *the sinner*, and not of *the law*. (3.) But the sinner dies in a very peculiar sense—he dies *by the body of Christ*, or in his person, and he dies in spirit to the law. And when he dies thus, he is married to the Lord, and delivered for ever from his first husband. *Let God's people, then, realize their privileges, and know that they are free.* Some who are professedly married to the Lord, act as if their first marriage remained still in force. They are still afraid of their first husband, and are ever attempting to avert his wrath by the way of works. They make a covenant with Jesus, but it is not so much a marriage covenant by which they engage to have Christ as their husband, as a servile covenant by which they engage to have him as a master. They engage to perform so much work on condition that he will pay them so much wages; and thus they hope that they may do something towards pleasing the first husband. This is the error of some, see that ye avoid it. Remember that, if ye are Christ's, ye are so delivered from the law that it has no power to condemn you. The covenant which bound you to it is as completely dissolved as is the marriage-covenant on the death of one of the parties. Ye are not under the law, but under grace; and when the law comes to you demanding allegiance, and threatening wrath as formerly, refer it at once to the Lord Jesus. Instead of seeking to compound with your first husband, by resolving and promising *to do* so much, make mention at once of the doings of your second husband, and plead them as your own. When

the law says, "You have sinned, and therefore you must die"—answer, "I have made satisfaction for my sins; I have already died for them." *Law*.—"When and where did you die for your sins?" *Answer*.—"I died when my Saviour died: I died upon the cross. I have given my heart to another, be it known to thee, O Law, even to him that was raised from the dead; and now I am so joined to him as to be a sharer in all that he has. If I still owe thee anything, speak to my husband, he will pay thee all." *Law*.—"But you are still bound to obey. Christ has given you no license to break my commandments, and yet you have broken them; you must still die for the sins committed since you became connected with Christ." *Answer*.—"No, Law, I must not die; for Christ's rule is not like thine. Thy rule says, The soul that sinneth *it shall die*; but Christ's says, The soul that sinneth *it shall be forgiven*. But I tell thee again, as I have told thee already, if I owe thee anything, speak to my husband. I am complete in him. Though I have nothing of my own to recommend me, his righteousness is mine; his works and merits are all imputed to me; I have consented to be his, and all that he has is mine—his blood, his sweat, his tears, his watchings, his prayers, his obedience, his sufferings, his death, his resurrection, his ascension—all these are for my benefit, O Law." Thus believers should act; for if they have a leaning towards the law, the law will be permitted to deal with them. "The Ghost of their first husband," as Boston says, "will come in upon their souls, and make demands upon them—commanding, threatening, and affrighting them, as if he were their husband still."

IV. But I hasten now to the fourth and last proposition contained in the text—viz., It is only when the first marriage is dissolved and the second contracted that fruit is brought forth unto God.

1. *The fruit of the first marriage is unto death*. "When we were in the flesh—married, that is, to our first husband—the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death," ver. 5. The offspring of the first marriage is sin, and sin tends to death, yea, has the elements of death within it. As soon as it comes into existence it begins to reign—to reign over its own parent, horrid to say, and it reigns unto death. Sin shall not have dominion over you that are married to the Lord, for ye are not under the law, but under grace; but sin shall have dominion over as many as are not married to the Lord, for they are not under grace, but under the law. Think, then, of this ye that are under the law, and ponder it seriously. Sin reigns over you, and its reign is one that terminates in death. After exercising its tyranny over you for a time, it will accomplish your ruin;

it will bring you down to death and hell; it will murder your precious soul; aye, and your husband will give it authority and strength for this purpose—"The strength of sin is the law." He will at last in justice abandon his guilty spouse to her own monster offspring—the fruit of her infidelity—sin; and sin shall hold her in everlasting thralldom, in everlasting death.

2. But *the fruit of the second marriage is unto God*. Being united to Jesus, the sinner is free from sin's dominion, has *his fruit unto holiness*, and the end everlasting life. The spirit of holiness overshadows the soul, and makes it fruitful in every good work. *Universal holiness* is the fruit of this marriage, and *holiness is fruit unto God*. But what is this holiness—what is its nature—and wherein is it exhibited? True holiness has its commencement in genuine repentance; its essence in love to God and to his plans; and its external manifestation in the obedience of the life.

It *has its commencement in genuine repentance*. Under the law the sinner felt, it may be, a great amount of compunction and alarm. He was brought down, so to speak, to the gates of hell, and made to tremble before the blazing of its everlasting fires. Yet his compunction and alarm sprung not from any sense of injury done to God, but from a principle thoroughly selfish, that had nothing holy about it, and that led to no holy results. But married to him that was raised from the dead, the sinner's sorrow is of a different sort. It is a godly sorrow, which constrains him to hate and flee from sin—"For, behold, this self-same thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge!" 2 Cor. vii. 11. Looking at him whom, by his sins, he has pierced, and recognizing in him his own loving Saviour, he mourns for him, as for a first-born or an only son. Hast thou endured all this for me, blessed Saviour? Have my sins, too, been upon thee, overwhelming thy cross, and piercing thy soul? And dost thou still love me? O what shame, what remorse, what fear fills my soul when I think of this!

But I have said that holiness, beginning in repentance, *has its essence in love to God*. While connected by covenant with the law, the sinner, on seeing the relation in which he stood to God, regarded him with *hatred and horror*. In his heart he secretly wished there were no God, at least none to punish sin—and no judgment day to vindicate the glory of his holiness. But now that this sinner is united to Jesus, he has new views of God's character, and purposes, and plans. They are now in his estimation all excellent, all infinitely good and perfect. To change any of God's plans he now sees were to do injury to the universe, as well

as to his own soul. He would not now venture to make any change though it were in his power. He would not even suggest any. The character of God is now infinitely glorious in his eyes—infininitely lovely. He loves God for the excellence of his character, as well as for the blessings of his salvation. The kindness and love of God the Saviour has now appeared, and the love of God is shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost, which is given him.

Then you will remark once more that *true holiness is exhibited in the obedience of the sinner* to the commands of God's law. Formerly the believer's obedience was selfish and mercenary; he served himself rather than his Maker. But now that he is delivered from the law and united to Jesus, he is actuated by a new and holy principle that leads to true obedience. The grace of God that bringeth salvation, constrains him to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.

You see, then, that while a sinner is married to the law, he will not bring forth the fruit of holiness—he will not *repent*—he will not *love*—he will not really *obey*. But when married to the Lord, he will do all these. The law, though it frowns upon sin, cannot put a stop to it, though it demands holiness, the demand is not obeyed. So God sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, that sin's dominion might be condemned in the flesh, and that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit. Now sin's dominion being condemned in our flesh, or sinful nature, and the righteousness of the law being fulfilled in us, we are holy in all manner of conversation—and this holiness is fruit unto God. It is just what God approves and accepts. It is his pleasant fruit, and it tends directly towards him. Just as sin tends to death, so holiness tends to God—lifting up the soul towards him, and fitting it for the enjoyment of him.

In concluding this subject, I would ask each in the audience, to which husband do you belong? Are you joined to the law, or joined to the Lord? How can I know? Look at the fruit of the connection. The tree is known by its fruit, and so is the human being. If the fruit be *sin*, you are without a doubt under the law, and the first marriage is still binding. But if the fruit be *holiness*, you are as certainly married to the Lord; and I am fully warranted in addressing to you the words of the text, with all the encouragement they imply—"Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God."

## S E R M O N C X X V.

THE OLD AND THE NEW TESTAMENT DISPENSATIONS COMPARED WITH RESPECT TO THE DIFFERENT WAYS IN WHICH THE WILL OF GOD WAS REVEALED IN EACH.

BY THE REV. ALEXANDER GRIERSON, A.M., IRONGRAY.

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son.”—HEBREWS i. 1, 2.

THE key to the correct understanding of the scope and design of this whole epistle, is to be found in the peculiar education and prejudices of those to whom it was addressed. As the title informs us, it was written to the “Hebrews;” to those, that is, who were of Jewish descent, and whose minds were consequently stored with the prejudices and partialities of the Jewish race. Among these descendants of Abraham there was doubtless exhibited a great variety of faith and character, some having been converted to the saving knowledge of the truth, others attempting to make a compromise between their hereditary faith and that of the Gospel, by blending the ceremonies of the one with the profession of the other; while the vast majority professing a great zeal for “the law,” and rigorously adhering to the letter of its external rites, continued in opposition and unbelief, “contradicting and blaspheming.” But amid all this diversity of character, there was one feature common to them all. Being Hebrews by birth, they were all more or less tinctured with the prejudices of their nation. They gloried in being the descendants of God’s ancient, chosen, and once highly-favoured people, and esteemed it their proudest boast that they had “Abraham for their father.”

Nor were such likings and partialities greatly to be wondered at. The love of country and a prepossession in favour of its customs and institutions, seem to be feelings natural to man. The mind dwells with fond delight on those tales of a far distant age which have been handed down from sire to son along the descending stream of tradition; and the past fortunes of one’s fatherland afford subject of pleasing entertainment to the family-group, when assembled around a venerable

father, they eagerly listen to his recital of the history of a former generation. But when the country of our birth is also associated with the religion of our forefathers, and all that is noble and chivalrous in patriotism is blended with all that is pure and devoted in piety, then, by the operation of these two conspiring forces, a new charm is imparted to the history of our ancestors, and an additional attachment is felt to the forms of our ancestral faith. The influence of these principles is strongly felt and strikingly exemplified in the religious history of our native land. Where is the Scottish peasant, within whose breast there beats a Scottish heart, who can read, without emotion, the tale of a by-gone age as related in the inscriptions of the martyrs' tombs, or point, without a feeling of patriotic pride, to the rude monuments and cairns, which mark the spot where the dust of the martyrs repose, and tell of the contendings of our brave and pious forefathers for the liberties of their country, and the pure worship of their God?

But these associations, touching and tender as they are, furnish but a faint emblem of that overweening partiality, that almost idolatrous veneration, with which the Jews, in apostolic times, looked back upon the history of the Jewish race, and the ceremonies and observances of the Jewish ritual. Not only did they cherish the thought of the distinction they enjoyed, as being the descendants of a nation to whom belonged the high prerogative of being chosen of God from among all the nations of the earth, that they might be to himself a very peculiar people, and of the unnumbered tokens of his favour, with which, in past times, they had been honoured; but, furthermore, they remembered the promise that had been made to Abraham, that in him, and in his seed, all the nations of the earth should be blessed; and all-unconscious that that promise had already been accomplished in Jesus of Nazareth, whom they ignorantly crucified, they were still looking forward to its fulfilment with fond hopes of the restoration of their departed glory. Nor, in one view of it, was there any thing very wrong or censurable in all this. Their fancied distinction, as the seed of Abraham, was at least a natural feeling, and their expectation of the fulfilment of a promise made to their progenitor by a God who cannot lie, was well grounded, based as it was upon the faithfulness of a covenant-God. But then, the nature of the promise itself was misunderstood. Instead of the meek and lowly Jesus, they expected a bold and warlike ruler, who should retrieve the lost laurels of their race. Instead of the "Prince of Peace," they expected a temporal prince, who, by his superior enterprise and valour, should restore the kingdom of Israel. And thus did that very promise, which, if rightly understood, would have prepared them to hail the Saviour's approach, become, by their carnal interpretation of it, an

additional barrier in the way of their reception either of himself or of his doctrine. With all the tenacity and national vanity of the Israelitish race, they clung to the rites of the Israelitish commonwealth, and even those of them who had embraced the gospel, still retained a lurking partiality in favour of the Mosaic law.

Now, it is to convince them of the unreasonableness of this preference, that the Apostle throughout this epistle directs the whole weight of his argument. Being himself an "Hebrew of the Hebrews," and bearing in mind throughout that those whom he is addressing are his "brethren according to the flesh," he reasons with them on their own acknowledged principles. He finds no fault with their worshipping the God of Abraham. On the contrary, he avows the object of their worship to be also the object of his own. He declares, at the very outset, that "God," *the same God*, "who at sundry times, and in diverse manners, spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son." The very fact, too, of which he reminds them, that God had not once for all given a full and finished revelation of his will, but had *at sundry times* and *in divers manners*, spoken to the fathers by the prophets; this very fact he employs as at least a probable argument to convince them, that the gospel communication proceeded from the same Author. By their own confession, the intimations of God's will which had been given to their fathers were not simultaneous and complete, but partial and gradual. He had given them "line upon line, and precept upon precept." If, therefore, they rejected this last revelation of God's will, and that on the ground of an exclusive adherence to His former revelations, their forefathers might, with equal justice, have rejected one of the later, because they had previously received one of the earlier prophets. If they rejected the gospel because of the precious promulgation of the law, as well might their ancestors have refused to listen to Malachi, because they had previously been addressed by Moses. There was, therefore, no antecedent improbability against the truth of this last revelation of the will of the Father. And though God had now chosen a new medium of communication, and instead of addressing them as formerly by the prophets, was now addressing them by his own Son, yet this was nothing more than the testimony of the prophets might have led them to expect; for "to Him gave all the prophets witness." By the mouth of his servant Moses, the Lord himself had said, (Deut. xviii. 18.), "I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words into his mouth, and he shall speak unto thee all that I shall command him." And when this great teacher, "the Messiah promised to the fathers" at length appeared, instead of disparaging the prophets who

had preceded and predicted his coming, he bore his testimony to them in turn, when he said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets, I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil."

Assuming it, then, as a fact, to which the Scriptures abundantly testify, that not only since the commencement of the Jewish commonwealth, but since the commencement of the world, God has had a church or elect people in the world, to whom he has revealed his will "at sundry times, and in divers manners," to the patriarchs and prophets of a former age, not less than unto us "on whom the ends of the world are come;"—I propose to direct your attention to the different modes in which that will has been revealed.

*First*, we shall consider the manner in which God revealed his will to the Old Testament church;

*Secondly*, the manner in which he is now addressing us under the New Testament;

And *thirdly*, some points of agreement and difference between them.

I. *First*, then, let us attend to the manner in which God communicated his will in Old Testament times. This he is said in the text to have done "at sundry times, and in divers manners." The sundry times here spoken of, may perhaps refer to the three great eras or successive landmarks of the Old Testament history—the patriarchal, the Mosaic, and the prophetic ages of the Church. But as this view of the subject, however warrantable in itself, would conduce but little to the elucidation of the subject more immediately under consideration, namely, *the manner* in which the will of God was revealed; and as it is our present object to bring before you that which was common to them all, rather than any thing peculiar to each, we shall consider the sundry times here spoken of, as referring simply to the gradual and successive intimations of God's will, which were given to the fathers, or Old Testament saints, from the time of Adam to the time of Christ.

During the whole of that period, though the manners in which he spake were divers, yet there is one common property which belonged to the mode of all his communications, namely, that they were made "*by the prophets.*" It is to be observed, however, that the Scriptural meaning of the term prophet is more extensive than that which is now commonly assigned to it. It is applied not only to those who foretold future events, but to all who were Divinely commissioned to declare God's will. All those whom the spirit employed as the subordinate authors of the books of the Old and New Testament Scriptures were prophets. Thus, it is written regarding Moses, that "there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to



face." Now, it was by such Divinely commissioned and qualified messengers or prophets, that God revealed his will to his people, in ancient times. Here, then, there were obviously two steps or stages in the process of communication; first, the will of God was revealed by himself to the prophets; and then, secondly, when thus revealed, it was declared by the prophets to the people. These two stages in the process of communication we shall consider separately, and for the sake of distinctness we shall take the last first.

1. Let us, then, briefly glance at the means by which, when the prophets had ascertained the will of God for themselves, they communicated it to the people. Now there were two distinct means, which, by the direction of God, they employed for this purpose. The first was by direct statement addressed in express terms to the ear; the second by representative type, or emblematic action presented to the eye. Thus, we frequently meet with such a commission as the following, given by God to his servants, (Exod. iii. 16.) "Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and *say unto them*, the Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared unto me saying, I have surely visited you, and seen that which is done to you in Egypt, and I have said I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt unto a land flowing with milk and honey." In this mode of communication, the will of God was conveyed by the prophets to the people in direct and articulate language.

But we also find God's prophets addressing his warnings to the people in another way, not by words, but in a way which conveyed a meaning more striking and emphatic than any words could have been employed to express; as when Jeremiah was commanded to make "bonds and yokes, and to put them upon his neck," (Jer. xxvii. 2.) in order to forewarn the Jews of their approaching captivity and bondage in Babylon. And we find a similar commission given to Ezekiel in these words (Ezek. v. 1-2.) "And thou, son of man, take thee a sharp knife, take thee a barber's razor, and cause it to pass upon thy head, and upon thy beard: then take thee balances to weigh and divide the hair. Thou shalt burn with fire a third part in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are fulfilled; and thou shalt take a third part, and smite about it with a knife; and a third part thou shalt scatter in the wind." Dreadful warning to the Jews of the righteous retribution that awaited them for their impenitence! fearful and expressive symbol of the three different kinds of punishment with which God was about to chastise that backsliding and rebellious nation! The third part of the hair which was thrown into the fire, represented the third part of the Jewish people, that was to be given over as a prey to the wide-wasting pestilence. That

part which was smitten by the knife, was the appointed emblem of another third part of the Jewish race who were to be cut down by the devouring sword. While the remaining part which was committed to the wanton breezes of heaven, to be wafted at their pleasure, was emblematic of the Jewish dispersion, when they were to be, as they continue at this day, scattered among all the nations under heaven.

Such, then, were the two great means by which the prophets communicated God's will to the people, namely, words and representative acts. But before it could be communicated by the prophets to the people, it required first of all to be announced to the prophets themselves.

2. Let us then attend to this, the first step in the process of communication. And this, also, God accomplished not only at sundry times, but *in divers manners*. Thus, God himself had said, (Num. xii. 6-8.) "If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold." Sometimes it was effected by an impulse or inspiration of the spirit upon the mind,—“holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost,”—and sometimes by an audible voice, as it was to Elijah when he stood upon the mount before the Lord. (1 Kings xix. 11-13.) “And behold the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord: but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. And it was so when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave; and behold, there came a voice unto him, and said What doest thou here, Elijah?”

We also read of God speaking to Moses out of a cloud, and answering Job out of a whirlwind.

But there was yet another mode of communication between God and his prophets, more striking and wonderful. We find frequent instances, in the Old Testament history, of the appearance of a mysterious visitor from heaven, who talks with his servants face to face. Thus we read, in the 18th chapter of Genesis, that the Lord appeared to Abraham on the plains of Mamre. When Abraham sat in his tent-door, in the heat of the day, he saw three men standing by him. After having partaken of their hospitality, two of them pass on toward Sodom, while the third holds an interview with Abraham—speaks to him with all the authority of God, and is addressed by Abraham, in re-

turn, as "the Lord, the Judge of all the earth." As he reasons and expostulates with Him regarding the fate of Sodom, he says, "Behold, now I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes;" and yet He had been spoken of only a little before as one of the three *men* who appeared unto Abraham. The same mysterious personage appears once more upon the scene, in his interview with Jacob. "When Jacob was left alone," we read in the book of Genesis, (xxxii. 24-30) "there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh: and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh: and he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And he said unto him, What is thy name? and he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name: and he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? and he blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." At the beginning of the interview, you will observe, he is called man—"There wrestled a *man* with him," and at the conclusion of it he is called God; Jacob says, "I have seen *God* face to face." The prophet Hosea, too, says, in reference to this same interview with Jacob, (Hos. xii. 2-5) "By his strength he had power with God: Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he found him in Bethel, and there he spake with us; even the Lord God of Hosts; the Lord is his memorial." Here there are no less than three different names applied to the *man* who wrestled with Jacob; he is called *God*, *the Angel*, and *the Lord God of Hosts*. There is just one other passage to which, at present, we would direct your attention, as illustrating the person and character of this mysterious visitor—we refer to his interview with Moses in Horeb. In the third chapter of Exodus, at the second verse, we read, that "The angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. And Moses said, I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I. And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look

upon God." Then, at the 13th verse, "Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? What shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, *I am that I am*: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, *I am* hath sent me unto you." Now, there are three conclusions deducible from this passage; namely, 1st, That he who spake to Moses out of the midst of the bush was the same who had appeared to Abraham on the plains of Mamre, and wrestled with Jacob at Peniel; for he says, "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." 2dly. It appears that he was the angel of the Lord, for it is said, "The angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in a flame of fire, out of the midst of a bush." And, 3dly, this angel was none other than God himself, for it is not only said that "*God* called unto Moses," and that "Moses was afraid to look upon *God*," but he reveals himself by the incommunicable name of Jehovah—"God said unto Moses, *I am that I am*."

But who, then, is this mysterious personage to whom so many, and seemingly irreconcilable titles are applied? He is God, yea, the Lord God of Hosts—the uncreated *I AM*—the self-existent Jehovah. But then, we are told, (John i. 18) "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." The man, therefore, who talked with Abraham, and wrestled with Jacob, is none other than "the man Christ Jesus;" the angel who called unto Moses out of the midst of the bush is no other than "the angel of the covenant," whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting—the second person in the adorable Godhead. God the Father dwelleth afar beyond the ken or cognizance of mortal eye. The dazzling lustre of his divinity is brighter than human vision can behold. He dwelleth, indeed, in light; but that light is inaccessible. He maketh dark clouds a curtain round about his awful majesty. It is only as reflected in mild and mellow lustre, in the person of God the Son, that any one has ever seen the glory of God the Father. And if the bright effulgence of his glory, even as thus reflected and veiled amid the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the smoking summit of Sinai, was so overpowering that the Israelites were fain to stand afar off, saying unto Moses, (Exod. xx. 19) "Speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die"—how much greater must have been their trembling and amaze, had the unveiled glory of unmodified Godhead been disclosed to their view. If their eyes were dazzled with the reflected beams, oh! how could they have contemplated that dazzling tide of unclouded splendour that issues

direct from the throne of Deity, before which even the unfallen seraphim veil their faces with their wings? "Let me," said Luther, "have nothing to do with an absolute God; for, out of Christ, our God is a consuming fire. It is only from *God in Christ* reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing to men their trespasses, that I hope for mercy." And just as God's purposes of mercy could be executed and conferred upon man only through a Mediator, so it was only through a Mediator that these purposes could be revealed to man. God is "of purer eyes than to behold iniquity;" and he is prevented, by the very purity of his nature, from holding direct intercourse with the guilty. In every instance, therefore, which occurs in the Old Testament of God's appearing to, and speaking with, his servants since the fall, it is to be understood of Christ, our own Immanuel, the great Prophet of the Church. It was the eternal "Word," though not then "made flesh," whose voice was heard by the first guilty pair in Eden, in the cool of the day, who appeared to Abraham, and wrestled with Jacob. It was our identical Saviour who, having heard the groaning of his people in Egypt, came down to deliver them, and gave Moses his commission from the midst of the bush. It was He who divided the Red Sea, and went before the Israelites, through the wilderness, in a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night—who gave forth the law from Sinai—whose glory filled the tabernacle—and who was worshipped in the temple at Jerusalem. In short, it was he by whom the scheme of salvation has been administered from its commencement, and shall continue to be administered till its close. What a glorious consistency is thus stamped upon the whole scheme of grace! Well may the saints' in glory, of every age and dispensation, as well as of every kindred and nation, and tongue, unite in chanting the glorious song—"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing, for he was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by his blood." What an affecting view is thus presented of the Saviour's love and watchfulness over that Church which he hath purchased with his own blood, when he is thus identified with the Messenger of the covenant, "whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting," whom we find ever and anon appearing to his Church in the wilderness, and both conveying and executing for them his purposes of mercy! "In all their afflictions he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them; in his love, and in his pity, he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them, all the days of old."

But how, it may be asked, does this representation consist with the statement of the text, which seems to imply that it was not until "*these*

*last days*" that God "hath spoken to us by his Son?" The illustration of this point we leave to the third head of discourse, when we come to speak of the points of difference between the modes of address under the Old and New Testament economy. Meanwhile we proceed to consider, in the *second* place,

II. The mode in which God is now addressing us, under the New Testament dispensation.

God "hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son." The use of the word *spoken* is here striking and peculiar. It is not said, that God hath sent us a message, but that he hath *spoken to us*, by or in his Son. It seems to contain an allusion to one of Christ's titles, and perhaps this part of the subject may be most clearly illustrated by considering the import of that title. If we would fully understand the way in which God *speaks* to us by his Son, we must weigh well the meaning of that term "word," as applied to him. Christ is called the "Word" (John. i.) "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." And you will at once see the propriety and force of such a title, when applied to Christ, if you consider its simple literal meaning, from which this its metaphorical or figurative sense is derived. What, then, is a Word? It is an embodiment or expression of thought. Thought itself is the product of mental exercise, and so long as it is unuttered, it remains shut up in the dark and mysterious chambers of the soul, where it is neither known nor felt by any except by him in whose mind it grows. But thought, when expressed in language, becomes a word. A word, then, is the vehicle of thought, by which it is conveyed from one mind to another. How is it that you are at this moment cognisant of the thoughts that are passing through my mind? You cannot ascend to the fountain-head of thought. You cannot penetrate the secret chambers of imagery, and read engraven there the thoughts which are springing up within the busy work-shop of the soul. But when once the speaker's thoughts are clothed in articulate language, they pass from his mind to yours, and words are the winged messengers by which they are conveyed. Now this may enable us to understand why Christ is called the "*Word*." The title is applied to him, because he reveals the mind of the Father. Just as a word spoken or written is an audible or visible representation of invisible thought, so is Christ "the visible image of the invisible God." "No man hath seen God at any time, the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." "Be astonished, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! for the Lord hath spoken." The eternal Word hath come down from heaven; he hath tabernacled among men, "And we beheld his glory,

the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." So that we need not to say in our heart, "Who shall ascend into heaven, to bring Christ down from above, or who shall descend into the deep, to bring up Christ again from the dead? But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart." Instead of the ministry of the prophets, therefore, we live under the more immediate ministry of the Son of God.

Now, as we have already seen that there were two ways in which the prophets addressed the people, namely, by words and by representative acts, so there are two ways in which the Son of God addresses us. He speaks to us both by his preaching and by his patience, by what he said and by what he suffered. Is there not a speaking power in the humbleness of his birth, and the stedfastness of his obedience—in his fasting, and watching, and temptation—in his tears, and his agonies, and his cries. As he hung upon the cross, a spectacle to angels and to men, his latest words, "*It is finished,*" tell of his completed obedience, and the full purchase of eternal salvation to as many as believe. And even after his body has ceased to breathe, and his heart has ceased to beat, what mean those outstretched arms—those bleeding hands? Do they not tell of the efficacy of his Mediatorship, for reconciling sinners to the Holy One? The one hand is outstretched toward God, the other is outstretched toward man; and he is the only "daysman who can lay his hand upon them both." But the crucifixion of Christ not only tells of the reconciliation of God and man; it also points to the means by which that reconciliation is produced—for each hand is a bleeding hand. The one pointed towards God tells of the satisfaction offered to God's outraged justice, which demanded that, "without the shedding of blood there should be no remission." The other tells of the efficacy of the same blood for purging and pacifying the sinner's conscience, and slaying the enmity of the sinner's heart. On the whole of this wonderful transaction, and its result, the words of the Apostle furnish the best commentary (Eph. ii. 13, 17), "But now in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby; and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh."

III. Let us now proceed in the *third* place, to compare these two

modes in which God has revealed his will, by noticing a few points of resemblance and contrast between them.

1. Now it is obvious to remark that the revelation contained in the Old Testament, and that contained in the New, have the same author. Both are from God. Nor is there any difference in regard to their substance. Christ is set forth as the object of saving faith in both. The same sun, both natural and spiritual, which now cheers us, hath cheered and enlightened all the succeeding generations of our race. Christ is "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," and in his name the prophet speaks when he says, "My righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation."

And not only do the revelations vouchsafed under the Old and the New economy agree in regard to their authorship and substance, but the modes in which they were respectively conveyed, though differing in some important points of detail, are substantially the same. The very day on which Adam sinned, all immediate intercourse between God and man was interrupted, and, if that intercourse was ever to be restored, it could only be through a mediator. "The only begotten Son, who was in the bosom of the Father," then entered upon the mediatorial work to which he had been appointed in the counsels of eternity, entered upon it in all his offices, as prophet, priest, and king. By him, as the prophet of his people, the first promise of grace was revealed. "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." This and all succeeding intimations given to a sinful world of the will and the purposes of God, whether by the Father to the prophets, or to us "on whom the ends of the world are come, have been made through Christ. In a word, the commencement of Christ's prophetic was coeval with the commencement of his priestly and kingly offices, and all have been exercised by him since the fall.

Having thus seen wherein the revelations under the old and the new economy agree,

2. Let us now consider wherein they differ.

*First*, then, there is this obvious difference between them, that the way of salvation is *more clearly* revealed to us than it was to the fathers. The Old and the New Testament revelations thus resemble the lesser and the greater lights which were made, the one "to rule the night," the other "to rule the day." The former, though sufficient to guide the midnight wanderer on his path, is yet far from yielding that dazzling effulgence which flows from the great orb of day. In like manner, though the light reflected from the "Sun of Righteousness" by type and prophecy, was sufficient to keep the feet of God's believing people from



wandering upon the dark mountains, it was yet far inferior, in point of clearness, to that which we now enjoy—a light so ample and resplendent that “the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.”

But, again, the will of God is now revealed *more extensively* than it was under the ancient economy. Under that economy, the written revelation of God’s will was confined to the Jews. While other nations were sunk in the darkness of heathenism, it formed their high distinction, that “to them were committed the oracles of God.” Nor was the line of distinction which separated the Jewish nation from all others of the same kind as that which now separates those who are blessed with the knowledge of the Gospel, from those who sit in “the region of the shadow of death.” The line which now separates between light and darkness, is gradually shifting its position as the Gospel is diffused; and the friends of Christ are cheered with the prospect that truth shall advance and error shall recede, until the line that separates them shall disappear, because the kingdom of Christ shall have become universal, and the kingdom of Antichrist shall have been destroyed. But the line which separated the Jewish nation from all others, was one drawn by the appointment of God himself, and which was destined neither to disappear nor to shift its position, until the fulness of the time should come, and the dispensation to which it belonged should be superseded. From the time of Abraham, the revelation of God’s will was confined to the Jews. *Now* “there is neither Greek nor Jew.” When Moses went up to the Lord at Sinai, the commission he received was this, “Thus shalt thou say to *the house of Jacob*, and tell *the children of Israel.*” (Exod. xix. 3.) The commission which Christ gave his disciples was this, “Go ye, therefore, and teach *all nations.*” *Formerly* the field was Judea, *now* “the field is the world.” And although the gospel chariot still lingers on its way, by reason of the feebleness and indifference of those by whom it ought to be urged onward to its glorious destination, yet the eye of faith can anticipate the time when it shall compass the world, when the reign of darkness, and error, and sin, shall be superseded by the reign of light, and truth, and righteousness; when “the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the whole earth,” even as the ocean covers its bed. Then shall Christ see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied; and the shout shall arise on earth, and be re-echoed in heaven, “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ.”

Once more, the revelation made to us in the gospel is final, and therefore *more enduring* than that contained in the Old Testament Scriptures. The revelations which those Scriptures contained, and the economy with which they were more immediately connected, were not intended to be

final. When the fulness of the time was come, and the new and better covenant was more fully revealed, the former covenant, which had begun "to decay and to wax old, was ready to vanish away." But the times of the gospel are called "*these last days*," because it is the last dispensation under which the Church of God is to be placed in its probationary state. And as illustrative of these distinctive characteristics of the Old and the New dispensations—the one being introductory, the other final—it is interesting to notice the marked difference of manner in which their respective canons are brought to a close. In the close of the one we read, "Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Mal. iv. 5.) In the close of the other we read, "If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book; and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life." (Rev. xxii. 18, 19.) Thus it is manifest that the old dispensation was only preparatory; that which was ceremonial was to be abolished, and that which was imperfect was to be supplemented. But the gospel shall neither be superseded nor supplemented, until Christ shall come in the clouds of heaven "with power and great glory."

But *finally*, the most important distinction of all remains to be noticed. In time past, God spake to the fathers *by the prophets*, but he hath in these last days spoken to us *by his Son*. Not that we are to suppose that, in former times, God spake to the prophets directly and immediately without the intervention or mediatorship of the Son. We have already seen that it has always been the office of Christ to reveal as well as to purchase salvation for his people. But the grand distinctive difference consists in this—that while formerly the Son of God, *in his Divine person*, revealed the will of God to the prophets; in these last times, Jesus Christ, incarnate, hath revealed the will of God to the Church. The Word has been "made flesh, and dwelt among us"—"who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you."

Whether, then, we look to the clearness or the extent, to the duration through which it is to continue, or the messenger by whom it has been conveyed, we perceive that the revelation made to us under the New Testament dispensation has the pre-eminence. In all these respects, "even that which was made glorious had no glory, by reason of the glory that excelleth."

But while all this heightens our privilege, let us not forget that it also deepens our responsibility. Is the way of salvation more clearly revealed to us than it was to the saints of a former age? Then, if ou

feet still stumble on the dark mountains, it can only be because we are wilfully blind. And shall it not redound to our condemnation, "that light hath come into the world, and that we have loved darkness rather than light, because our deeds are evil?" Has the wall of separation between Jew and Gentile been broken down, and does God now "command *all men everywhere* to repent?" Then that command is addressed personally and individually to each of us, and if we do not personally, and each for himself, comply with the command, and embrace the gospel offer, we incur the guilt of a positive refusal to listen to the command of God, and of a positive rejection of the offers of his grace; or, if we have indeed tasted and seen that the Lord is gracious, then, remembering that "the field is the world," and that in consequence of this, the knowledge of the truth has come to us Gentiles, let us labour and pray that others may be made partakers of "like precious faith with us." Are the times of the gospel the last times? Then let us remember, that if the means of grace which we enjoy, do not, by the blessing of God, prove effectual for our salvation, our salvation is hopeless. We have no other Messiah to wait for, no further revelation to expect. If, under the gospel, we still remain unconverted and unsaved, may not God say regarding us, "What more could I have done for my vineyard that I have not done for it?" It were vain for one to arise from the dead. We have not only Moses and the prophets, we have Christ and the Apostles; let us hear them. And, last of all, is God now speaking to us by his Son? Then how tremendous the responsibility of refusing to listen to his call! The principle commends itself to every conscience, that the guilt of rejecting a message increases in proportion to the dignity of the messenger. It was on this principle that the Saviour sought to bring conviction home to the hardened minds of the Jews, when he propounded the parable of the householder, who having planted a vineyard, let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country. "And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants *more than the first*; and they did unto them likewise. But, last of all, he sent unto them *his Son*, saying, *they will reverence my Son*. But when the husbandmen saw the Son, they said among themselves, this is the heir, come, let us kill him, and let us seize his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him. When the Lord, therefore, of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him, he will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him their fruits in their season.'" Thus were these wicked Jews, like David when addressed by Nathan,

led to pronounce their own condemnation. But let us remember that the principle of the parable is as applicable to gospel rejectors still, as it was to the Jews who crucified our Lord. The messenger by whom the gospel is addressed to us is God's own Son; and if we refuse alike to be awed by his majesty, or won by his tenderness, then shall not the men of Nineveh rise up in judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and, behold! a greater than Jonah is here. Oh! while we repeat the words, let us seek to grasp and to realize the stupendous thought, that "the mighty God, even the Lord, hath spoken, and called the earth, from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof;" that he who "stands at our door and knocks," and who, by his providences, his word, his ministers, and his Spirit, entreats us to "be reconciled unto God;" that he is none other than Jehovah's fellow. And does not every conscience respond to the awful appeal—"How shall we escape, if we neglect this great salvation."

In conclusion, are there any who, while gratefully alive to the importance of all these distinctions, and joyfully appreciating the pre-eminent privileges now possessed, yet feel as if all these advantages were counterbalanced by the fact that the Jewish people lived under a theocracy, and that prophets were raised up to address them from time to time, according to the ever-varying exigencies of their condition, while Christ is now gone "to his Father and our Father," and we have no farther revelation to expect, however our circumstances may vary? Now it is most true that the Shekinah is no longer visible, resting upon the mercy-seat, and that He whom the Shekinah represented no longer tabernacles among men. "The heavens have received him until the time of the restitution of all things." Yet he has not left his people comfortless. Among his latest words, we find the promise recorded, "Lo! I am with you alway, even to the end of the world." "I will not leave you comfortless; I will come unto you." Most true it is, that we have no farther revelation to expect, amid all the vicissitudes of Christian experience. There is no other promise on which the faith of a believer can rest, than those which the Bible contains—no other source of consolation to which he can turn than "that which is written." But the objection keeps out of view the important truth that Christ still "walks among the seven golden candlesticks"—that he sends forth his Spirit to enlighten his people's eyes, and to comfort his people's hearts. Indeed, the objection seems to be anticipated and answered by the very form of expression in the text. "God hath *spoken* to us by his Son;" as if he had said, You are not dependent merely upon a dead book for counsel and consolation; you have a living teacher, an ever-present

friend. The living teacher can adapt his lessons to the varying circumstances of those whom he instructs ; every new emergency that occurs calling forth from him corresponding reproofs or encouragements. The instruction contained in books is unchangeable ; and circumstances may sometimes arise in the reader's history for which the book has made no provision. No such defect, however, is ever experienced by the New Testament believer. He has no farther revelation to expect, either oral or written ; but that is only because "the law of the Lord is" already "perfect." It makes provision for every case that can arise in the believer's experience. It resolves every doubt, it satisfies every want, it banishes every perplexity. And not only is the believer furnished with a perfect revelation, but there is a living, though invisible Saviour, before whom he can spread his case. There is a living ministry "for the perfecting of the saints ;" there is a living Spirit to "bring all things to their remembrance." Thus richly furnished, we appeal to the believer himself, whatever may have been his circumstances, either in the hour of gladness, or in the hour of gloom, whether he has ever searched the Scriptures, with faith and prayer, and yet failed to find "a portion of meat in due season." And, if this be your experience, oh believer ! then remember the obligations you owe to Him by whom all this rich provision has been furnished ; and forget not the object for which it has been made—"That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

## SERMON CXXVI.

PRESENCE OF CHRIST IN THE MEETINGS OF HIS PEOPLE.

BY THE REV. WILLIAM WILSON, CARMYLIE.

Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.—  
MATT. xviii. 20.

THERE are two things in the text that claim our attention. There is a promise, and a statement of the circumstances in which that promise will be realised. The promise is, “there am I in the midst of them.” The circumstances are, “where two or three are gathered together in my name.” Let us attend to these points in the order in which they have now been stated.

First of all, let us look to the *promise*: “There am I in the midst of them.” And upon this observe, *first*, that there is a certain sense in which it is true of Jesus, that he is present with all men and at all times. This is true of him in his divine nature, for it is essential to our very conceptions of that nature to believe it omnipresent. Jesus unites in his own person both the nature of God and the nature of man. As man, he once tabernacled on this earth, as man he is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God, and is present in the upper sanctuary and no where else. But before he appeared in fashion as a man, he had an existence—he was from eternity with God—he was God—and in this nature manifested the divine energies of the Godhead, for all things were created by him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In this nature he is everywhere present, and it is true of him what the Psalmist says of the Father, “Whither shall I go from thy Spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence. If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.” Wherever we are, then, by night or by day—whatever we do, or think, or speak, Jesus is a present observer of all. Nothing escapes his cognizance, and by thus searching all things, he becomes qualified for the discharge of that last grand duty which is devolved upon him as Mediator, to judge the world in righteousness. And it were well that

we remembered continually that we are never hid from the presence of him who is now our witness, and will one day be our judge. He notes and records every unholy thought, every vile desire, every idle word, every wicked deed; he is in the midst of all men; very near each of them for this purpose; and when the throne shall be set, and the books opened, and the wrath of the Lamb displayed—the fearful scroll shall be unfolded in presence of the assembled universe, and secret things made known, and the memory of forgotten sins recalled, and the wicked sent to hell with all their sins engraven upon their souls, and brought to their everlasting remembrance.

It is very plain, however, that when Jesus gave to his disciples the promise contained in the text, he meant something different from that to which we have referred. There is a sense in which he is present with his people, in which he is not present with the world. And when in the text Jesus gives the promise of his presence, he gives it not as something which they should dread and tremble at, but as that which was peculiarly fitted to comfort and animate them. It was in this sense that God of old time was present with his people in their journeyings through the wilderness. He was with them as a guide in all the way, as a minister of their daily sustenance, as a shield against their most powerful enemies. It is the same kind of blessings which Jesus here promises to his people; even to be with them in all the way of their pilgrimage, to sustain, and comfort, and defend them, and to manifest himself unto them in another way than he does unto the world, to show them his glory and the power of his grace. When Jacob fled from his father's house, fearing the anger of his brother, and set out on his distant journey with only his staff in his hand, he had this very promise fulfilled to him in some measure. When he lay down at eventide, under the open sky, and took of the stones of the place and made them his pillow, his soul was refreshed by sweet visions of the divine glory, and views of that ceaseless intercourse established between heaven and earth, in which the angels are ever ministering to the heirs of salvation, and the children of God, in their utmost destitution and abandonment, are made to know and feel, that though cast down they are not forsaken, but that they have a mightier force on their side than all that can be against them. The Patriarch exclaimed when he arose, surely the Lord is *in* this place: and he called the name of it Bethel—the house of God. Even so it is, that Jesus is in the midst of his people now, and amply fulfills the promise of the text. Though no longer manifested in those outward palpable revelations of his grace and glory, fitted to that state of the Church in which faith had less to rest upon, he gives to his people a sweet consciousness of his abiding presence, which

not the less true and soul-satisfying that it is invisible. He gives the soul a nearness of access unto himself—draws forth its desires, and inflames them with admiration and love—exhibits his own infinite graces, and beauty, and fulness—opens the eye of faith to behold his unspeakable preciousness—brings into the mind the sayings of his holy word, with such sweet consciousness of their truth, that their hearts burn within them as they talk with him—enlarges and purifies their affections, and pours into them the refreshing streams of his own love, and thus establishes and maintains a communion with himself all the more near and intimate, that it is directly with the inner man, at once melting the soul with the glow of his love, and awing it to humble reverence by the exhibition of his glory.

Still farther, the promise implies a readiness, on the part of Christ, to do for his people what they ask. This will be at once apparent, if we examine, for a moment, the connection of the text with the preceding verse. The statement in the text, indeed, is given as a reason why the disciples should rely with confidence on the promise made to them. “Again, I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth, as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven; *for* where two or three are met together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” That is to say, you may rest perfectly certain, that your requests shall be attended to and fulfilled by my Father, for I am present to hear them offered, and in discharge of my mediatorial service, I present them before the throne on high: the Father heareth me always, and the prayers of my people shall not be disappointed. It is plain, then, that the promise of the text is one of assistance, that it includes the idea of Christ’s presence as Mediator, and prevailing intercessor, making known the wants of his people, pouring them into the ear of the Father, and obtaining, on the ground of his own merit, a favourable answer to all their requests. It may easily be conceived what confidence and gladness such a promise was fitted to convey to the minds of those to whom first it was uttered. They had forsaken all for Christ, and were following him as the Good Shepherd; and from what they had observed and experienced, both of his power and his condescending love, it needed no more than the promise of his abiding presence to communicate to them the assurance that whatever their future lot might be—whatever the exigencies of their condition—they would be aided and delivered in such a way as at once to exhibit the grace and beneficence of his own nature, and to convey to them that efficient help which they required. And not less comforting is the promise to the disciples of Jesus now, for it is the very object and design of his presence in the midst of them, at the same time to direct and to



fulfil their desires, insomuch that, when any two of them shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them, or by them, either in their standing still and seeing the salvation of God, or in their being made more than conquerors, through him that loved them.

But again, the whole richness of the promise has not yet been unfolded. There is something like an emphasis in the way in which it is written, and the peculiar form of expression is not devoid of significance. I am "in the midst" of them. Jesus is not merely beside his people, observing their condition, and ready to tender his aid in their difficulties. He is not only manifested as near to them all, to inspire them with confidence and hope. He is in the very midst of them, mingled with the assembly, and equally near to every person who composes it. And this naturally suggests the thought, and confirms the doctrine, that Jesus is not only with his people for the purpose of examining into their wants, and conferring upon them those blessings of his salvation which are common to all believers, but, moreover, that with tender consideration he regards the utterances of every individual heart, and makes the outgoings of his benevolence not merely commensurate to their expressed desires, but confers upon each those special graces which are fitted at once to sweeten the spiritual intercourse of the soul with himself, and to enrich it with those divine ornaments which shall best display the lustre of his own glory. He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. It is his delightful office to "lift up the hands that hang down, and to confirm the feeble knees." It is the part of him who is meek and lowly in heart, to "appoint unto them that mourn, beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." It is his to say to the timid soul, "Fear not, for I am with thee, be not dismayed, for I am thy God;" to those, who are tempted, to whisper the glad assurance, "my grace is sufficient for thee, my strength is perfect in weakness." It is his to shew to the ignorant the treasures of his wisdom, and to say of the backsliding penitent, "bring forth for him the fairest robe, and let the fatted calf be killed, for this my son was dead and is alive, he was lost, and is found." For every diversity of condition in which his people are placed, Jesus has something appropriate to bestow, and he is in the midst of them for the very purpose of providing for their special wants, and soothing the diseases, and healing the plagues of every soul. Confide, then, O believer, in this merciful Saviour, "in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead. Open up your hearts to communion with him. Let him know your spiritual diseases—fear not to express to him your heart's desires—and all your plagues

shall be healed, and your souls filled with peace and joy unspeakable. And is it really so that this promise is in course of daily fulfilment among Christ's people? It were worth while, as the best test and assurance of it, to examine the feelings, and to ascertain the supplies given to an assembly of sincere worshippers. Suppose for a moment that we were gifted with a power of vision into the inner chambers of thought, and that we could see an assembly of disciples as they are presented to the eye of omniscience—that we were cognizant of the thoughts which occupy the mind, and the degree in which these operate upon the affections—and that we could notice the outgoings of the various desires of every heart, and measure the degree of their intensity, then beyond doubt we would also perceive the outpourings of the Divine beneficence—to every soul its measure—for every desire its appropriate counterpart presented—and to the intently directed thought visions of heavenly truth opened up as intimate, and satisfying, and subduing, as those which prophets and holy men of old were privileged to enjoy. Nay, without supposing this unattainable spectacle of the spiritual world, is there not presented to our common every-day observation, if we would but notice it, an abundant confirmation of the promise before us? Let but two persons, differently circumstanced, speak over their individual experiences after leaving the assembly of saints, and the faithfulness of Jesus to his promise would become at once apparent. The same truths have been presented to all, and in the same form—the same desires have been expressed in prayer—the same thanksgivings uttered, yet how infinitely varied are the results produced! Even on the supposition that all are believers, and that Jesus has been giving something to all, sending none empty away, how diverse the gifts he has through the same instrumentality bestowed! One soul, according to its need and its capacity, has laid firm hold of one truth, on which it rests and in which it rejoices—another has obtained a new view of the infinite grace and beauty of Jesus, and is ravished with the contemplation of it, and so throughout all the diversity of human condition—according to the temptations, the distresses, the capacities of each, it has been found that Jesus has been ministering his varied gifts. The like figure to this we have presented to us in the processes of the vegetable world. In a garden the trees of various kinds, the bushes, the vegetables, the flowers, have all outwardly and visibly the same kind of nourishment supplied to them—they are all planted in the same soil—they are all refreshed by the same showers—warmed by the same sun—fanned by the same breezes, yet how diversified the results, and how gloriously do the wisdom, and power, and beneficence of God shine forth in them! He fits each for the reception of those ingredients suited to its nature—en-

dows each with the power of elaborating and assimilating these—and supplies each with its appropriate nourishment. Even so it is with Jesus in the midst of his people. He distributes to every one of them the portion they require—those gifts which fit them for the place they are designed to fill, and the purpose which in the kingdom of grace they are intended to serve. And all this he accomplishes through the same outward instrumentality.

Nor must it be forgotten that all this divine operation, whereby an infinitely varied supply is afforded, and results equally glorious and harmonious are produced—each member being fitted for its own special office—it must not be forgotten that all this is directly spiritual, and that there is throughout a twofold operation carried on. For not only is Jesus in the midst of his people—standing as it were close beside every soul, and with untiring beneficence conferring upon it a suitable provision, but that Jesus is also in every believer—within the sanctuary of his heart, creating within it, and enabling it to put forth its gracious affections—transforming it by his plastic hand—enlarging its capacities, and fitting them for the reception of heavenly nourishment. This also is involved in the promise of the text, and this view of it is what constitutes its chief preciousness. For what were it to the dead to mock them with the offer of food, of which they had no power, and could have no desire to partake? But Jesus is in the midst of his people. He comes knocking at the door of their hearts, soliciting a welcome admission, and gaining access through the power of his own grace—he controls and directs all their thoughts within them—and sends forth those far reaching desires which enter into that which is within the veil. And it is of importance to bear in mind that this promised presence of Jesus is not transient and temporary—is not reserved for some rare and solemn occasions. The expression of the text is very emphatic. *I am* in the midst of them—a much more decisive statement than if it had been expressed in the future—I *shall* be with you. For it amounts to this: In the circumstances described, you may be assured there shall be no room for expectant and anxious hope. It is always a present truth. *I am* with them. In no age of the world, in no country shall this be untrue. My presence shall anticipate hope. Nowhere shall my people be gathered together in my name but it is true concerning them at that time and in these circumstances that *I am* in the midst of them. Behold, then, how very rich is the promise of the text—a promise that endureth for ever—a promise boundless in its reach and amplitude! How may we attain its realization? Under what circumstances shall it be fulfilled in our experience? Let us now therefore enquire into the second thing proposed, and endeavour to dis-

cover the circumstances under which we may surely expect the fulfilment of this rich and divine promise. "When two or three are gathered together in my name."

It is obvious from the context, that the promise has a special and primary application to the office-bearers of Christ's Church, when gathered together for the exercise of Church government. But while this is plainly the primary and special application of the text, it cannot be doubted that it was given forth for the direction and comfort of the disciples of Christ in the widest sense of the term, and that the promise it contains may be laid hold of in faith by all assemblies of Christ's people. And in this view I remark, first, that the promise is made to disciples. This is obvious from its connection with the preceding verse, in which the answer to united and believing prayer is promised to two of them, *i. e.* of the disciples, harmonizing in their sentiments, and from the heart sending up to God the same requests. The two or three in the text, are just the same class of persons, for it is stated as the very ground on which their prayers will be answered, that "Jesus is in the midst of them," giving efficacy to all their petitions, and acceptance to all their services, by his own infinite worth, and his all-prevalent intercession. And when we consider this, is there not plainly discovered to us at least one reason why our solemn assemblies, in the house of prayer, are so little blessed? Outwardly, indeed, all are there as disciples, but how very little is there of the spirit of discipleship—of looking to Jesus for light, comfort, peace, purity, the effusion of every grace! Outwardly all assume the reverent attitude of prayer, but how little is there of real oneness of heart, and faith, and hope, touching those things which they shall ask of God! And now we complain not so much of that mere cold formalism so extensively prevalent, which induces men to draw near to God with the mouth, and honour him with the lips, while the heart is far from him. Our complaint is, that the prayers of the sanctuary are not joined in, even as a matter of form. Its language enters into the ear, but it provokes no gracious desire heaven-ward. It is heard, not joined in. It may be the prayer of the minister, it is not the prayer of the people. They do not unite together in it, and hence it brings down no liberal response from heaven. How changed would the aspect and the enjoyments of our assemblies be, if this soul-starving habit were altogether abandoned; if, as disciples of a common Lord, we were with one accord in one place; if the utterance of every petition from the minister brought forth the image and echo of itself from the souls of all the people, so that the desires should not be his but theirs also—the prayer not an utterance for them, but an utterance by them—united

hearts sending up one common petition. It is not a groundless imagination, but one of the most sober and well-grounded realities of faith in such circumstances, to expect the revival of the glorious days of Pentecost. Indeed, amid all the faithlessness and carnality of Christ's disciples, there is left to us so much at least of the experimental proof of the truth embodied in the text, as to satisfy us of this. There are, perhaps, in every congregation, more or fewer who in some measure fulfil the conditions of the promise, who meet together as disciples. And to them Christ proves his faithfulness. The assembly is the most delightful place of resort to them, for it is their meeting place with Christ. They feel it to be refreshing and profitable for their souls. They receive out of Christ's exhaustless stores. It is seldom that the Sabbath is to them a day lost, and if there be such times of drought and barrenness, none are so prepared to admit as they, that they have lost a precious opportunity; not because Christ is faithless, but because they have not met as disciples. Nor does the experience of others afford less convincing proof of the faithfulness of Christ to his promise. The Sabbath is to them a weariness. They go to the house of God with listless minds, with hearts hardened and encrusted with worldly cares, and they return home more wearied than they went. So much time has been passed over, but it has been time wasted. Jesus has not been beside them, they have not seen him in his holy place, nor have they tasted of his grace. But wherefore? They have not gone up to the assembly as disciples; they have not waited there in that character. They have gone in obedience to the claims of custom, without faith and without hope, and they have been sent empty away. They have not taken any part in the services of the sanctuary, and they have not been made partakers of its blessings. They have presented their bodies before the Lord, but the text contains no promise of carnal blessings. It is with the soul that God has to do in all its thoughts and affections. And were the investigation made, whether the thoughts, and desires, and hopes, and fears of such men were gathered within the sanctuary, and waiting in patient expectation upon God, we would find that, so far from the circumstances being realized in which we might expect the fulfilment of the promise, these seeming disciples of Jesus who have been visibly brought together, were in reality each eagerly pursuing his worldly avocations—the merchant engaged in his busy traffic, and the labourer anticipating the renewal of his toil. What fearful mockery is this of the Divine omniscience? Does it not cease to be wonderful that there should be so little realization of the Divine promises? Is it not altogether amazing that there should not be upon us the visitation of destructive wrath?

But when we say that Christ's promise in the text is to disciples, it is

needful to guard against the inference, that it is vain for others to wait upon his ordinances. Christ, it is true, has said that he is in the midst of his disciples, but this, so far from excluding others from such an assembly, contains an ample encouragement for them to come. Christ is there—pre-eminently, peculiarly, powerfully, graciously, there. This is the very place then to meet him, and to behold his glory and the power of his grace. Christ is in the midst of his disciples to strengthen and refresh them; he is there to convince and convert the unbeliever. The king is there with his quiver full of arrows; and it is there especially that he pierces the hearts of his adversaries. He is there to wound, that he may bind up and heal.

I remark, secondly, that in order to realize the riches of the promise, the disciples must be gathered together. It is true that there is no time and there are no circumstances, when Christ is absent from his people. His promise is, "Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world." He is not only beside his people, but dwelling in them by his Spirit. Their bodies are temples of the Holy Ghost. And it is most comforting and blissful to know that we are called upon to undertake no duty, to endure no trial, in which we have not the assurance of Christ's presence and aid. He dwelleth with us, and shall be in us. But he has given special promises to the congregation of his disciples, and from what we read of the experience of the saints of old, as well as from what has come within the range of our own observation, we are entitled to conclude that it is within his house, and in the assembly of his saints, that he makes the clearest manifestations of his glory, and pours forth the richest effusions of his grace. Hear, for example, the testimony of David, "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. Blessed are they that dwell in thy house; they will be still praising thee," Psalm lxxxiv. "As the heart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God? When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude; I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holiday," Psalm xlii. It was manifestly as the result of his own personal experience that he declared, "The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God." And now were our hearts but one in anticipation and in desire with that of the Psalmist, we would become possessed of the same

experience, and know it as a joyful truth that the Lord loveth the gates of Zion. This place would soon become distinguished as the birth-place of souls, and also as that in which there was nearest access to God, and the brightest manifestations of his glory.

Now, none of us, at least, are without the experience of having been often gathered together with the multitude that keep holiday, and go to the house of God. How does it stand with us in respect to the experimental fulfilment of the promise? Have we met with Christ? Has he been in the midst of us? Have we seen his power and his glory in the sanctuary? If not, the guilt is all on our side—it is all accumulated on our heads. And it is an overwhelming iniquity to have spent one profitless Sabbath within the courts of the Lord's house. The king, by the proclamation of the text, has invited us to come and meet with him in his court, that he might make us partakers of his grace, and to show us all his riches and power, and we have slighted the invitation, and thus insulted his majesty and his goodness. There can be no doubt that Christ is there, and if we have not met him, and been satisfied with his presence, it is because we have not been there. Our bodies may have been, but our spirits have not waited upon him. And the communion of Christ with his people is that of spirit with spirit. The assembly spoken of in the text is not the gathering together of the outer frame work, but of living spirits—the gathering in of the wandering thoughts—the subjugation of the unruly desires—the concentration of the mind—the summoning of all the faculties of our nature to a reverent waiting upon Jesus. To do this is to gather ourselves together, and when we do this, Christ is in the midst of us. To do otherwise is to mock Jesus with the show of worship.

But you will observe still farther, that the disciples are not only to be gathered together, but to be gathered together in the name of Christ. Now, in order fully to understand what this means, consider for a moment what it is, to pray in the name of Christ. It is to utter our requests in the full consciousness of our own infinite demerit—to confess that we can hope for and obtain nothing from God on our own account—to entertain full confidence in the merits of Jesus, and in the faithfulness of the covenant promises in him. It is to renounce ourselves, and to put on Christ—to hope for mercy only in him, as washed in his blood, and clothed with his righteousness. Again, when Peter, at the gate of the temple called Beautiful, said to the lame man, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk," he was doing a work, to the performance of which he was himself utterly incompetent. His word had power, because the Spirit of Christ was within him, and he did the miracle in the name of Christ, just to declare that

this was a manifestation of the grace and power of Jesus, and not of his own, that he was able to do it just because Christ was in him, and working through him. In the same sense you are to understand the general exhortation, "Whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." For as we find this exhortation exemplified in the life of the Apostle, we perceive that whatever he did, he did it through Christ strengthening him. We find him even declaring that he had no life of his own—that everything he did and said and thought was so much Christ's, that it was to be disavowed and disowned as his own. "Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life which I now lead in the flesh is by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Thus, then, we are led to perceive what is the meaning of gathering together in name of Christ. We are to come as led by his grace, and under the constraining power of his love. We are to come before God as guilty and deserving only of wrath—hoping in Christ—cleaving to Christ—covered by Christ. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thee as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings." We are to gather under the wings of Christ—as acceptable only in him—we are to speak and hear his words—looking to him as made of God unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. Hence you will perceive the whole of the gracious meaning embodied in the text. It is a declaration on the part of Christ, that all which is needed in order to obtain the manifestation to us of his glory—his efficient and never-failing help—the communication of the graces which each one of his people severally require—in order to have him dwelling in us in all the constraining and elevating influence of his spirit—in order to our being made partakers of the fulness of the blessings of his purchase; all that is needed is, not that we should make ourselves worthy of his favour, but to receive freely of his exhaustless stores. He is in the midst of us, anticipating as it were every wish, and going beyond the compass of our desires and expectations; he is there even before we call him, and answers while we are yet speaking, if only we come as disciples and gather ourselves in his name. There can be no doubt that he will take us—adopt—cherish—glorify us; all the difficulty and hindrance is overcome when we have taken him. He did not hesitate and draw back from us—the reluctance is all on our part. When we have gathered together in his name, he is already in the midst of us. And then observe for a moment how the connection between Christ's abiding presence and the reception of all heavenly blessings is brought out in the text. It shall be done for them of my Father who is in heaven, *for* where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am in the



midst of them. When Jehovah looks on such an assembly he is well pleased for his righteousness sake. He sees not them, but him who is in the midst of them. He regards them in the face of his anointed. They become objects of his infinite complacency as in Christ. He is well pleased with the Son, and therefore with them. All Christ's beauty and merit is theirs, and all the love of the Father to the Son becomes theirs. Here then we discover the secret source of all the believers privileges and enjoyments. These all come to him through Christ, and as he is abiding in Christ. He has Christ's name upon him, and Christ's spirit within him, and hence the Father accomplishes for him all things needful now, and will crown him with glory hereafter.

## LECTURE XXXIV.

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“ And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, and saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof; but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say unto this *man*, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth *it*. When Jesus heard *it*, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven: but the children of the kingdom shall be cast into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the self-same hour.—MATTHEW viii. 5-13.

THE seventh chapter of Luke, from the first to the eleventh verse, contains an account of one of our Lord's miracles, substantially the same as that in the passage now before us. There can be no doubt that they are distinct accounts of one and the same miracle; though the narrative of Luke, being considerably more minute than that of Matthew, of course presents us with particulars of which there is no mention in the passage I have now read. In following out, however, the narrative, as it is recorded in Matthew, we shall take advantage of those particulars with which the account by Luke furnishes us.

Our Saviour, we are informed in the previous history, had been travelling throughout all Galilee, “teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.” The fame thereof had extended so wide, that great multitudes were attracted from Galilee, and Decapolis, and Jerusalem, and Judea, and from beyond Jordan, to see the miracles he performed, and hear the doctrines which he taught. Surrounded by so vast a multitude, whom it was his design to instruct in the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, he ascended a mountain, where he delivered the discourse contained in the three preceding chapters. Having finished this discourse, in which he set forcibly before his hearers the grand principles and duties of religion, he descended from the moun-

tain, and, accompanied by vast multitudes as formerly, directed his way to Capernaum. But no sooner had he entered, than he was arrested in his course by a message from the Roman centurion, earnestly entreating him, that he would now exercise that miraculous power with which he was vested, for the recovery of his afflicted, palsy-stricken servant, who was grievously tormented, and ready to die. It is said in the second verse of the seventh chapter of Luke, that a certain "centurion's servant who was dear unto him, was sick and ready to die." We are thus introduced by the sacred writer to the two individuals who are to be brought prominently before us—the centurion, who interceded for his servant, and the palsied servant, the object of his care.

There is a circumstance in this verse which ought not to be overlooked. The servant was dear to his master, and now that he was afflicted, he was the object of his most ardent sympathy. He had ingratiated himself with him, whom in the designs of Providence it was his destiny to serve, no doubt by strict integrity in the performance of that which was intrusted to his care, and by an assiduous discharge of all the duties it was his business to perform. His integrity had gained for him respect. His ready obedience to his master's orders, and studious concern for his interest and welfare, had rendered him the object of his grateful and affectionate remembrance. For, diverse as may be the conditions of human life, and varied as may be the orders of society, there is an integrity and high principle which commands respect wherever it is seen—an affectionate regard for another's welfare, which is ever sure to become an object of the same concern. Humanity is not altered by the ranks and orders of society. But, indispensably requisite as these are for the welfare of our world, the same honour, and integrity, and high principle, with which we may meet in the highest circles of society, may rest just as truly in the bosom of the humblest of earth's multitudes. The reciprocity of kindly feeling which is exemplified in the instance before us, if brought more prominently into view by being exemplified more frequently in the practical concerns of human life, would tend mightily to the peace and prosperity of society, by connecting its orders together in closer union; dissipating the sourness of feeling and discontent in the lower orders of society on the one hand, and, on the other, that haughtiness and overbearing which looks on all beneath its circle in society, as beings of an inferior creation—the serfs of nature.

The centurion, thus influenced by an affectionate concern for the welfare of his afflicted servant, no sooner heard of the approach of Jesus, than he sent to him the elders of the Jews, entreating his interference on his behalf. Though himself a Gentile, from his residence among the Jews, he became acquainted with their religion. And knowing the

estimation in which the Gentiles were regarded by them, he presumed not personally to approach Jesus, whom doubtless he knew to be the King of the Jews; and who added to the distinction of nation the far greater one of Divinity. But he sent the elders of the Jews to make intercession on his behalf. He sent those whose entreaties he conceived might be most effectually employed on behalf of his afflicted servant; yea, on his own, sympathizing as he did most deeply with his servant's sorrows. He sent to him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant. From the first he seems to have entertained no doubt of our Saviour's capability to answer his request. There is no betrayal of a doubt as to the extent of his power. But, however the disease may have baffled human skill and human ingenuity—and no doubt such would be eagerly brought to play by the centurion on the object of his sympathy—he looks fearless and undismayed to him who acted as never man had done, who made the dumb to speak, and the deaf to hear, and with the voice and authority of omnipotence awaked the slumbers of the tomb. He conceives not of a possibility of failure on the part of him to whom he applies—all he seeks is but to awake his sympathy, but to interest him in the case of his afflicted servant, conscious that if this were done, his object was attained.

The elders of the Jews whom he sent to our Saviour on this important errand, were not behind in their discharge of that which was intrusted to them. They eagerly pressed those arguments which they considered most fit to interest our Lord on his behalf. They knew what those circumstances were which would most powerfully influence themselves, and these they hesitated not to consider as what would most powerfully influence him. "They besought him instantly, saying, that he was worthy for whom he should do this, for he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue." They contented themselves with no *cold* parade of the tokens of his kindness which he had bestowed on them; but with the utmost earnestness and eagerness they pleaded his cause. They besought him *instantly*, with the utmost importunity, assuring our Saviour that he was worthy. Nor did they rest their plea upon the mere kindness they had *individually* received. They could point to a far more powerful and patent testimony—his love to their nation, manifested in the good he had conferred on it.

And here we have one of the many proofs of the power which every man possesses of making friends of his foes, and dissipating the hatred of his enemies. The Centurion's very presence in Capernaum was a token to the Jews, that they were a subjugated and conquered people; that they were fettered in their power, and cramped in their liberty; that their national glory was effaced; and that now no longer free

and uncontrolled, they had to bow beneath a foreign yoke, and acknowledge the supremacy of a foreign power. His very presence, then, must have galled them in the extreme—must have arrayed against him the whole host of their national prejudices. And just as the abhorrence of a line of policy is transferred to every individual who is connected therewith, would the feelings of hatred and dislike, with which they viewed their conquerors, be transferred in this case to the Centurion, who was one of them. But even the manifestation of feelings so natural, he hushed into repose. Not only did he lay to slumber the secret grudge and hatred which it was to be expected they would bear toward him, but he called into play their best feelings of love and of regard. He ingratiated himself in their affections. He entwined around him their tenderest sympathies. And how? Not by a parade of great regard, and of great friendship, which we see to be the policy of many, who look with astonishment and surprise upon the failure of their scheme,—but by bringing palpably to bear upon them the plain and substantial *fruit* of such feelings—leaving these to be gathered from the results which they serve to bring about. He did not set about to declaim to them regarding the ardency of his affection, or the keenness of his sympathy. He followed nature more faithfully, by leaving these to be gathered from the line of conduct which they led him to pursue.

But we have no reason to think that such was the moving force in the mind of the Centurion. The love and respect of the Jews which he gained, I have stated, was the natural effect of his conduct; I do not say that the attainment of them was the inducement which led him so to act. Nay, on the contrary, the evidence goes all the other way. The Centurion seems to have been a believer of the Jewish faith. He seems to have been influenced with love and reverence for the God of Israel. And most probably, acquainted with the prophecies of the Old Testament Scriptures, he hailed our Saviour as the “Sun of Righteousness” who was to “arise with healing under his wings.” The Centurion, be it observed, occupied the most favourable ground for profiting by the proclamations of the Gospel. A Gentile by birth, yet instructed in the Jewish faith, he possessed all the knowledge of the Jews, but he wanted all their prejudices. He had that which in them should have led them to the Saviour, but he wanted that which mainly kept them away from him. And so it were no wonder that he welcomed the lowly Nazarene as the promised Saviour—the centre and the substance of the Jewish dispensation. But be this as it may, undoubtedly he entertained high reverence for the God of Israel. He regarded the Jewish religion as the true one; and, in accordance with such views, used his influence on its behalf. He viewed it as a mighty blessing to weary

wanderers in earth's wilderness to have recourse at all times to the comforts and consolations of religion, as to the wells of water in a wilderness, by which, refreshed and invigorated, they might go on their way rejoicing. And so he dug, as it were, a reservoir into which these streams might flow, that thence the waters might descend more copiously to irrigate and refresh the surrounding territory of the moral world. He built them a synagogue, the greatest of all blessings he could confer; even as thereby he tended to promote the most important of all their interests—the interests of eternity. He might have conferred on them the short-lived pleasures of a day; and there might have been many to extol his generosity. But just as he conferred on them a blessing, whose results would stretch onward to eternity, and downward to succeeding generations, did he bind more closely to himself the religious and right-hearted among whom he lived, and generations which should arise, when they had been gathered to their fathers. The elders of the Jews, accordingly, well instanced this as what they chiefly founded on. A greater proof of the sincerity and intensity of his love to them, it was impossible for him to confer. They pleaded “that he was worthy for whom he should do this, for (said they) he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.”

And now let us attend to the reception they met with from our Saviour. It is simply stated that “Jesus went with them.” Through the elders who came to our Saviour, the Centurion besought him that he would come and heal his servant. Our Saviour complied with his request, and went with them to see the object of his kindly sympathy. He did not lend a deaf ear, as we find he did at first to the Syrophenician woman, who, an alien from the commonwealth of Israel, had herself approached, and made her supplication to Israel's God. But very probably because of this diversity in the two cases, what he saw fit to do in the one, he refrained from in the other. He went his way directly to Capernaum. Whether some of those whom the Centurion had sent on this errand to our Lord, had hastily returned to him, with the glad tidings that Jesus was on the way to see him—or considering that it is said, that by this time Jesus was “not far from the house,” the Centurion saw him at the distance—or, that this, as a new and more becoming line of conduct, now flashed for the first across his mind, he resolved to intercept him in his course, counting himself altogether unworthy that our Saviour should come to him. We are told that the Centurion sent friends to our Lord, saying, “trouble not thyself.” He was unwilling that for such as he, Jesus should put himself to inconvenience; or that, as if he were the superior, Jesus as the inferior should come to him. True, he was exalted in station, as an officer

in the Roman army, and very probably one of the greatest men in Capernaum. It was his fortune to command, at least as often as to be commanded, probably far oftener, and he was doubtless the object of respect and esteem, courted by many—looked up to by many more. But he recognized in our Saviour a mightier—a greater than humanity. He saw in him one before whom it was his part to bow in lowly reverence. And so he hesitated not a moment, as if sorry for what he had done, to send immediately to our Saviour requesting that he would put himself to no inconvenience in the compliance with his wish.

Now I think that it is at this stage of Luke's narrative that the portion recorded by Matthew properly comes in. It seems clear that at some stage, the Centurion himself personally applied to our Lord. And I think if we make it here, it will be found that the two narratives perfectly coincide. Suppose that here, in this state of affairs, he followed up the intercessions of those whom he had previously sent to our Saviour by personally meeting him, what more natural than that he should commence with what weighed heaviest on his soul? that he should come beseeching him, and saying, "Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented?" (verse 5th.) And observe, there is nothing here in the shape of a request for Christ to *come* and heal his servant. Our Saviour replies as if persevering in the course he had adopted, "I will come and heal him." To this the Centurion answers, "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof;" or as it is in Luke vii. 6, "I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof." Or we may consider his address to our Saviour as commencing with a reiteration of what he had just put in the mouth of his friends, "Lord, trouble not thyself," which connects with the succeeding clause, "For I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof." He acknowledges his utter unworthiness of such an honour—he feels and owns his own littleness in the presence of the Lord. "Whence is this to me," exclaimed the enraptured mother of the Baptist, in days that are past, "that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" And influenced by the same feeling of reverence for the sacred Majesty of Christ, did the Centurion before us acknowledge his unworthiness to receive that honour, which our Saviour seemed willing to confer. "Lord," said he, "I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof." And he distinctly states to our Saviour, those motives which till now prevented him from personally addressing him. "Wherefore, neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee." He frankly acknowledges that his own views of himself were what deterred him from coming to our Saviour. He did not view himself as at all worthy to receive the gift which he desired. There was no claim which he could discern on

his part; nay, he conceived that he was unworthy, even personally, to proffer such a request. But the kindness and condescension of our Saviour gave him fresh encouragement. And what he could not venture to do at first, he felt emboldened to do now. If our Saviour were so kind and condescending as at once to comply with his request, and come and visit him, surely, he thought, that it were far more becoming one so unworthy as he, that he should immediately himself go to meet our Saviour, than that he should remain in his house till our Lord had come to hold a personal interview with him. This was what he conceived best befitting his situation. And his acting so, is perfectly consistent with his first request through the elders, that Jesus would come and heal his servant. For it is always found that, according to the Christian's advances in divine knowledge, are his advances in the divine life. At first the Centurion would look with very different feelings on our Saviour, than he would do afterwards when he heard of his ready compliance with his request. His knowledge of him would be much more meagre and superficial then, than now that he had heard that his own message had been graciously listened to. And so what he at first considered befitting him, he considered unbecoming after he had got a nearer and deeper insight into the character of our Lord. The Centurion altered his conduct. And so, my brethren, as we advance in the knowledge of divine truth, will many of us be led to alter ours. Things which we may now think befitting us, or altogether immaterial, will appear to us very different when shone upon with the light of the Bible—when our fancies and surmisings are made to give place to the facts of revelation, and when discerning more clearly the character of our Lord and Saviour, we suffer it to have its full and proper bearing on our life and conversation.

The Centurion is not in the least degree less earnest than formerly on behalf of his afflicted servant, though there is a marked change in the manner of his address. "Speak the word only and my servant shall be healed." This was the nature of the request which he now made. He spake no more of our Lord's coming personally to see his servant, as if that were necessary for his being healed. He asks him but to utter the word, conscious that by that, the object of his request would be instantly attained. Not like the nobleman of this very city, who over and over again besought our Lord to come personally to his house, and heal his son, and who at length, terrified as if the delay would blast all his hopes, cried out in the earnestness of paternal affection, "Sir, come down ere my child die." He considered the word of our Saviour as all that was required, and for that, and that alone, he prayed. He had enlarged conceptions of our Lord's character. He



viewed him as the Governor of the universe. He besought our Saviour that he would but speak the word, and his servant should be healed. And for this reason which he states, verse 9, "For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me, and I say unto this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, do this, and he doeth it." For this reason, that as my servant is obedient to my voice, and I in turn must be obedient to those who are over me, disease and death, which are but the servants of the Lord, must bow to his commands, and render him obedience. They are his messengers, and they must obey his orders. And, just as the soldier yields a ready obedience to the voice of his commander, must disease, and misfortune, and calamity, destitute as men may think them of all control, and pending on the hazards of an ungovernable contingency, yield obedience to his word. Over them he wields the sceptre of resistless sway; and to them as to his messengers does he issue his commands—"Go, and it goeth, and come, and it cometh." He beheld in Jesus the supreme governor of the world. And so he regarded even all the ills and accidents of life as directly under his control. What needed, then, that our Saviour should behold the afflicted servant, ere he raised him from the bed of languishing? Enough that he issued his commands—enough that the fiat of Omnipotence had gone forth—enough that Deity had spoken, his orders must be obeyed.

And now that our Saviour hath ascended up on high, and tabernacles no longer on our world, may we approach him with as believing confidence as the Centurion in the text. Though ascended where we see him not, yet may we trust to him with as unflinching confidence as did his followers, while he sojourned in our world. The Centurion prayed that he would but say the word, and his servant would be healed. We need but to pray that he would issue the mandate, assured that if he do so, the object of our desire will be attained. Our case is not the worse that our Saviour does not now adays palpably and personally go forth to lay his hands on the diseased. Enough that there issue from heaven's sanctuary the mandate to heaven's messenger, our prayer is answered—the object of our desire is attained.

Aye, and we may take a lesson in passing from the Centurion—a lesson which we are slow to learn, and slow to act upon. Not more is the soldier under the control of his commander, than is disease and calamity under the control of Deity. We are too apt to fret and murmur, when calamity overtakes us, forgetful that these are the messengers of the Lord of Hosts. And too apt to hasten for relief to every source but the true one—to him who alone can bid it go—and whose command alone will be obeyed.

But let us now look to our Lord's reply. It is said, verse 10, that when "he heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." He did not marvel as if there was here anything new or surprising to him—for that very faith of which the Centurion was possessed, was his gift. He *spoke* of it merely as of rare occurrence. And well might he do so when he could add that in all Israel he had not found such faith. Either in the first place, considered relatively to the means and opportunities afforded; or, perhaps in the second place, considered relatively to the faith of any of the Jews, absolutely in itself. For undoubtedly the faith of the Centurion was pre-eminently great, both as to the extent of the particulars it embraced, and also its intensity. There were many of whom it could not rightly be said that they disbelieved, of whom, however, it could be just as little truly asserted that they firmly believed. Not certainly that they were believing, and disbelieving at the same time. That was impossible. But their belief, such as it was, this moment, was succeeded by doubt and by wavering the next. There was a continued succession of assentings and of doubtings. The mind was painfully wavering between a firm belief and a fixed disbelief. This, which is the character of many even now-a-days, it were by no means wonderful should have been the character of many in the first dawn of Christianity. The mind was aroused to a belief of the truth, but it was not settled in the belief of the truth. The Centurion, however, had reached a point which was rarely attained. And our Saviour makes no secret of the fact, but, viewing his faith in connection with his Gentile origin, he passes off to speak of the fate of his despised and benighted brethren, in the far off and forgotten regions of idolatry, in reference to the highly favoured Jews. He lifts the curtain of futurity, and reveals their respective destinies. (Verse 11th.) "I say unto you," exclaimed our Saviour, "that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of Heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." This Gentile Centurion might be viewed as the first fruits of a glorious harvest which was soon to be gathered in from the benighted and outcast aliens from the commonwealth of Israel—the first ingathering from a region which was yet to be lighted up with the rays of the "Sun of Righteousness." The clouds of darkness which had brooded dismally in their horizon were at length to be dispelled, and the light of the Gospel as of a new creation to diffuse its gladdening beams. Heaven was yet to look in compassion on this outcast territory. The people who sat in darkness were to see a great light; and to them who sat in the region and shadow of death,

light was to spring up. But to the Jews, nursed and protected by Heaven's peculiar care, favoured with the manifestations of Heaven's peculiar love, who had been tutored and brought up in the very elements of the Gospel; "to whom pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose were the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came;"—to the Jews—the objects of Heaven's care, yet the despisers of Heaven's gracious invitations—awaited a far different destiny. Their sun, which had shone brightly, when a moral midnight had cast its shade over the surrounding world, was now as the reward of their impenitency to set in deepest darkness. The light which was once theirs was to be transferred to other lands—the privileges which they enjoyed, because of their abuse of them, were to be removed from them altogether. And the vineyard, which long they alone had been privileged to cultivate, but which they had shamefully neglected, was now at length to be let out to other husbandmen, who should yield the fruit thereof in its season. But most dreadful of all, their fondest anticipations were never to be realised. Children of Abraham, as they boasted that they were, but aliens from Abraham's faith, they were never to be privileged to enter with him into the realms of glory, and experience then the blessedness of nearness of communion with Abraham's God. Their very privileges, on which they based their proud and presumptuous boasting, would, because of their impenitency, rise up against them in the judgment to seal their condemnation. Their portion was to be at length "the outer darkness"—darkness the deeper that their transition was from light the brightest that had ever radiated on earth. Isaac, and Jacob, and Abraham, Jews indeed, but not Jews after the flesh merely, were to sit down in the kingdom of Heaven with far different company than they—Gentiles from the far-off corners of this world—these were to be the participators in their blessedness. With them they should sit down in company in the realms of glory and taste of joys untainted and of pleasures unalloyed.

This ought to read a weighty lesson unto us. It was not only for the Jews that they could boast of means and opportunities unrivalled. But, raised as they were to Heaven by their privileges, they were yet cast down to hell by their neglect of them. We have privileges, too, as they had—individually as members of society, and collectively as a nation. And, elevated like them, even unto Heaven by their multitude and greatness, see, I beseech you, that ye share not in their fate. It was not for no purpose that Israel of old held in her hand privileges greater than were vouchsafed to any other nation under Heaven. Neither is it that ye may trifle and take your ease, that privileges even

greater have been vouchsafed to you. If your improvement notwithstanding correspond to theirs, be assured so also will your destiny. And as it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Tyre in the day of judgment than for them, so even will it be more tolerable for them than you.

Our Saviour, after this digression, in which he sets forth the respective destinies of the Gentiles and the Jews, returns again (verse 13) to address the Centurion. "And Jesus said to the Centurion, go thy way: And as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the self same hour"—or, as it might be rendered, at that very time. No sooner was the mandate issued, than that commanded was performed. Disease, even as his messenger, obeyed his order. And, distant though he was from the afflicted servant, he gave forth but his word, and, healed of his diseases, the servant arose from the bed of languishing.

Now that the Centurion had obtained the object of his desire, and his servant had been healed, a purer pleasure would be lighted up among the inmates of his dwelling than aught of merely passing consideration was fitted to produce. He himself would be more closely united to our Saviour who had done so great things for him. And his servant, at once united to him who had so kindly and condescendingly compassionated his sorrows, would look upon his master with new feelings of respect and gratitude for his kindly intercession on his behalf. And all his dependents would be united to him in closer ties of love and reverence. And so far from this breaking in upon the peace and harmony of domestic order, each being bound to the other more closely than before, would perform his respective duties more conscientiously, and promote more fully the happiness of the whole. So true it is that in doing good to others we are doing good to ourselves.

I shall, in conclusion, set before you one or two of those grand lessons which this subject brings prominently into view.

And *first*, Let me take occasion from this to remark the duty of masters in relation to their servants. The interest of the Centurion, so far as referred to in the passage before us, related merely to the temporal welfare of his servant. And there are many now-a-days who readily go with him thus far, yet by a strange perversion of all reason, stop short, when the call for their interference becomes the louder and more important—when the claims of eternity present themselves in the place of the claims of time. They may be ready enough to soothe the sorrowful in the hour of their distress—to stretch out the hand of help when disease hath arrested them with its dismal visitations, ready enough to open up to them all the sources of relief which their means or ingenuity can devise. But they forget a disease which makes more dismal havoc,

though it be when the eye beholds it not—the soul, which may be the object of a sorer malady than ever made its dismal ravages on the outer tenement. They are moved with sympathy at the disease of time—they forget the disease whose duration is eternity. They look to the welfare of the body, as if that were all that was required of them—they forget that there is a soul which survives it. Now, if the things of a day, by reason and by Scripture, ought to be the object of your care, much more should the things of eternity. If sympathy and the common feelings of humanity interest you in the welfare of the body, much more should they engage your interest in reference to the soul. Each and all of us, as members of society, have a weighty responsibility upon our shoulders, arising from the influence of our example upon others. And heads of families, whatever fashion or the world may say to it, have this responsibility not lessened, but enhanced. To their care is especially entrusted the spiritual, as well as temporal, interests of the inmates of their houses. They are, as it were, rulers on a smaller scale. And just as it is required of the kings and potentates of the earth, that they promote the spiritual interests of their people, from the highest to the lowest, is it required of you, that you promote the spiritual interests of the members of your families, each and all of them. Abraham was a pattern to the faithful, and not the least remarkable point in his history is this, that he commanded his household after him. And just as the very foundation of all Christian enterprise and Christian duty, does it stand solemnly inscribed on the page of inspiration, that ye “do good unto all men as ye have opportunity.” Now if the common business and intercourse of human life afford opportunities—(and who will deny it?)—can it be denied that the closer and more stated intercourse of masters and servants, affords even more favourable opportunities? And if not, can it be denied that that passage of inspiration bears emphatically upon them?

But, *secondly*, You will observe the duty of making intercession on behalf of others at a throne of grace, and the encouragement afforded thereto. The Centurion besought our Lord while on earth on behalf of his afflicted servant, and the object of his desire he at once obtained. And now that our Saviour hath ceased visibly to manifest himself to the inhabitants of our world—it is not that a more meagre and imperfect dispensation hath now come—it is not that he hath removed himself farther away from the prayers and petitions of his people—but it is that interceding for them from his throne in heaven, he may plead their cause at the right hand of God. His ear is open as formerly to their every cry, and he is ready as formerly to grant an answer to the prayer of faith. And if, while he tabernacled on our world, he sympathised with afflicted neighbours and afflicted relatives, and in answer to

their supplications, stretched forth his hand to save; even now, as then, is he willing to bestow spiritual and temporal manifestations of his mercy. His ear is not heavy that it cannot hear, neither his hand shortened that it cannot save. The same resources are at hand as in the days that are past—and the same privileges being open to our acceptance, the same responsibility lies on us because of our employment of them. The effectual, fervent prayer of the righteous man availeth much, and will do so to the latest generations. And just then, as a mighty weapon—as a powerful engine which hath been entrusted to your care, is the privilege of intercession at the throne of heaven. Think what it hath done, and what it may still do. By this was heaven's azure canopy transformed even as it were into burnished brass, in the days of Elijah, while famine spread its ravages, and death was almost welcomed amid the woful desolation. By this was the sun arrested in his course, that it went not down. And though consequences such as these should be unknown in the present era of our world, yet who can tell but that it is daily followed up by events of far greater magnitude. Who can tell of the effects of the prayer of faith in the conversion of our world? Who can tell of the moral revolutions it has accomplished? Remember the apostle Paul, who, champion though he was of the cross of Jesus, and deeply as he had entered into the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, and largely as his soul had been refreshed and invigorated by the outpouring of God's spirit, yet wrote to the churches, whom he addressed, the simple but emphatic supplication, "pray for us." And think of the value of those supplications, of which an apostle himself besought that he might be the object. Think of the estimation in which he held them, when over and over and over again he besought that they might be uttered on his behalf. And consider, if you do well in confining your supplications merely to yourselves—in proffering no request for others at a throne of grace—in bearing none on your spirit, like the Centurion before us, in your petitions to your risen Lord. And bethink you if the withholding of privileges such as these, be not a sure and certain evidence that all is not right with your own souls.

*Lastly*, observe the intimate connection between great faith and great humility. The Centurion whose faith was so highly commended by our Lord, yet thought himself unworthy to appear in his presence. And so is it always. The mind trusts most implicitly in the Saviour just when it feels its need of him the most. And this it does, only when it discovers most clearly the condition which it occupies. And never is humanity prostrated more lowly in the dust, than just when it discovers its true character. The very basis of faith is a knowledge of our wants, The very knowledge of our wants is the foundation of humility.













